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1621 PROSPECT AVENUE
CLEVELAND

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Sept 1921

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CLEVELAND

Vistas

VISTAS

BY

WILLIAM SHARP

NEW YORK
DUFFIELD & COMPANY
1906

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This edition published July, 1906
by Duffield & Company

THE TROW PRESS, N. Y.

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To H. M. Alden.

IN dedicating to you this American edition of "Vistas" I am in the position of one of those islanders of old who offered their rude iron in exchange for wrought gold. They, however, bartered in all innocence: while I, for my part, know too well that nothing you can find herein can give you the same deep and lasting pleasure I have had in your beautiful and moving book, — the book of a lifelong dream, of a lifetime reverie, full of strange beauty, spiritual, wrought out of lovely thoughts into lovely words.

How well I remember the day when I first saw the Hudson in its autumnal glory! But memorable as that day is, shared with you and a dear common friend, poet and veteran critic, — in the "sixties" now, so far as years go, but in the wonderful "twenties" in all else, — my most living memory is of those proof-sheets of "The Following Love" which were entrusted to me, and made upon my mind so indelible an impression.[1]

[1] *Now, and so far less happily, surely, called "God in His World" (Harpers').*

Two years later I was with you again, when the shadow of ill lay almost more darkly upon you yourself than upon the blithe, heroic sufferer: and by that time I knew your book intimately, and had learned much from it. Then, too, I was able to show you one of these "Vistas," and to hear generous words in praise of what at best was a passing breath of music, as fugitive, and perhaps as meaningless to most people, as those faint airs heard by my charcoal-burner in the forest, as intangible as that odour of white violets which came and went with each delicate remote strain.

You asked me then what my aim was in those "dramatic interludes" which, collectively, I call "Vistas." I could not well explain: nor can I do so now. After all, I could make only a redundant use of the title. All are vistas into the inner life of the human soul, psychic episodes. One or two are directly autopsychical, others are renderings of dramatically conceived impressions of spiritual emotion: to two or three no quotation could be more apt than that of the Spanish novelist, Emilia Pardo Bazàn: "Enter with me into the dark zone of the human soul." These "Vistas" were written at intervals: the most intimate, in the spiritual sense, so long ago as the spring of 1886, *when, during recovery from a long and nearly fatal illness, "Lilith"*

came to me as a vision and was withheld in words as soon as I could put pen to paper. Another was written in Rome, after a vain effort to express adequately in a different form the episode of death-menaced and death-haunted love among those remote Scottish wilds where so much of my childhood and boyhood and early youth was spent. Some of my critics say that "Vistas" is but an English reflection of the Maeterlinckian fire. Two of the most Maeterlinckian are, by those critics, held to be "A Northern Night" and "The Passing of Lilith," — creations, if such they may be called, anterior to the fortunate hour when I came for the first time upon "La Princesse Maleine" and "L'Intruse."

I say "the fortunate hour," for almost from the first moment it seemed clear to me that the Belgian poet-dramatist had introduced a new and vital literary form. It is one that many had been seeking, — stumblingly, among them, the author of "Vistas," — but Maurice Maeterlinck wrought the crude material into a form fit for swift and dexterous use, at once subtle and simple. The exaggerations of his admirable method were obvious from the first; in "L'Intruse" even, more markedly in "Les Aveugles," unmistakably in "La Princesse Maleine:" and, it must be added, still more prominently in his

later productions. But he saw that there was a borderland for the Imagination, between the realms of Prose and Poetry. He discerned the need, even though it should be but the occasional need, — for after all it is only an addition to the old formulas that we seek, — of a more elastic method than any exercised in our day, one that would not restrict the elusive imagination nor yet burden it with verbal juggleries and license. There is room for the Imagination in Prose: there is room for the Imagination in Verse: there is room, also, for the Imagination in the vague, misty, beautiful borderlands. Of course there is nothing radically new in M. Maeterlinck's method. The Greek dramatists, the French, and, among others, Calderon notably, have all preceded him: the miracle-plays are "Maeterlinckian:" the actual form as now identified with his name was first used by his contemporary, Charles Van Lerberghe, in "Les Flaireurs." Probably there is never any quite new literary method. Certainly the greatest writers were not creators of the form or forms they adopted: Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Shakespere, Racine, Goethe, Hugo. But after all, these things matter little. The "form," be it what it may, is open to all. Our concern should be, not with the accident of formal similitude, but with the living and convinc-

ing reality behind the form, created or adapted or frankly adopted. No one would dream of an imputation upon a poet's originality if he choose to express himself in the sonnet form, the most hackneyed of all verse-formulas and yet virginal to each new wooer who is veritably son to Apollo.

After the two already specified, one or two of the "Vistas" were written in Stuttgart, in 1891, *others a year or so later in London or elsewhere, — all in what is, in somewhat unscholarly fashion, called the Maeterlinckian formula. The first which I wrote under this impulse is that entitled "Finis." The latest, or the latest but one (now added to this edition) seems to me, if I may say so, as distinctively individual as "The Passing of Lilith," and some, at least, of my critics have noted this in connection with "The Lute Player." In all but its final form, it is a conception, an embodied conception, that has been with me for many years, ever since boyhood: a living actuality for me, at last expressed, but so inadequately as to make me differ wholly from the distinguished critic who adjudged it the best of the "Vistas." To me it is the most obvious failure in the book, though, fundamentally, so near and real emotionally. But where doctors disagree how may the patient be sure on any point? If ever a book were*

diversely reviewed it is "Vistas." It has been called "rubbish," and has enjoyed the opposite extreme of appreciation: it has been dubbed immoral, and held to be purely mystical and spiritual: one leading literary periodical has ignored it altogether, and another of equal eminence devoted several columns to it: it has been patronized by a well-known young critic in the "Daily Chronicle" and snubbed by an unknown young critic in the "Bookman," and the "Scotsman" solemnly reprobated the author because (no doubt through ignorance) he began with a piece called "Finis." Through it all, the book has survived, and found its way: and I am content.

All this is very personal, but I suffer it to go, though so much more willingly would I let this dedicatory note remain a private letter. It was thought advisable that I should add something to the American edition, but the chief inducement for me was the opportunity of paying a tribute of affection and admiration to you, my friend, whom I honor and esteem so highly.

If "Vistas" be liked by those American readers who see it in this edition for the first time (whether or not their verdict be for "The Birth of a Soul," "The Passion of Père Hilarion," and "A Northern Night," as the gen-

eral estimate goes here) well and good: if it should not appeal, my regret will be genuine: but in any case what I hope for is that some of the younger generation may obtain from it a few indications, a hint, a suggestion, that may guide or help them towards that already near and profoundly important development of literary expression which so many of us foresee with eager interest. A great creative period is at hand. Probably a great dramatic epoch. But what will for one thing differentiate it from any predecessor is the new complexity, the new subtlety, in apprehension, in formative conception, in imaginative rendering.

WILLIAM SHARP.

15 GREENCROFT GARDENS,
LONDON, N. W.

Finis.

. . . Blood for blood,
Bitter requital on the dead is fallen.

EURIPIDES: *Electra.*

Finis.

[An obscure wood, at whose frontiers neither night nor day prevails, but only a drear twilight, a brief way beyond the portals of the Grave. In the vast vault overhead no cloud moveth, no star shineth.]

THE PHANTOM OF THE MAN.

The shadows deepen.

THE SOUL OF THE MAN.

[*Blind with the darkness of death.*] On! On!

THE PHANTOM.

This way let us go.

THE SOUL.

Chill, chill, the breath from the Grave. Would that I too were dead.

THE PHANTOM.

The wood is dark, and the shadows deepen.

THE SOUL.

Canst thou see *nought?* Dost thou see *nothing?*

THE PHANTOM.

I see nought. I see no one.

THE SOUL.

This awful silence!

THE PHANTOM.

Two shadows only — two shadows in the Hollow Land that move. We are they.

THE SOUL.

Dost thou not hear?

THE PHANTOM.

What?

THE SOUL.

Afar off, as in the heart of the wood, a strange sighing.

THE PHANTOM.

Is it the wind of Death?

THE SOUL.

Is it the perishing lamentation of the dead?

THE PHANTOM.

I see vast avenues penetrating the darkness of the wood.

THE SOUL.

And there is no one there? There is nought visible?

THE PHANTOM.

No shadow moves. No branch stirs. But always, always, leaves are falling: shadowless, soundless.

THE SOUL.

Let us go back: let us go back! It may be that in the Grave there is a place of rest!

THE PHANTOM.

I see the portals no more. A mist has risen.

THE SOUL.

What lies behind us?

THE PHANTOM.

Dim avenues. No shadow moves. No branch stirs. But always, always, leaves are falling: shadowless, soundless.

THE SOUL.

Which way came we?

THE PHANTOM.

I know not.

THE SOUL.

Whither go we?

THE PHANTOM.

I know not.

THE SOUL.

Did we perish ere we entered the dark way of the Grave?

THE PHANTOM.

The body died.

THE SOUL.

[*Terrified.*] Who art thou?

THE PHANTOM.

Thou.

[The Soul of the Man staggers wildly away, with outstretched arms, with lips moving in agony, but silent. The Phantom of the Man stands motionless. In a brief while the Soul has wandered in a circle back to the place whence it started.]

THE PHANTOM.

The shadows deepen. Let us go.

THE SOUL.

[*In the bitterness of anguish.*] I am as a leaf blown by the wind.

[They move through the gloom of a vast avenue. There is no sound, no stir, no shadow, though ever there are falling leaves that fade into the under-darkness. From afar, within the hollow of the wood, there comes a faint sighing, that is as the sea in calm or as a wind that swoons upon the pastures, but is not any wind that breathes on any sea.]

THE SOUL.

Doth it grow more dark?

THE PHANTOM.

There is no change. It is neither day nor night. But far away the avenues reach into utter blackness.

THE SOUL.

Doth a wind blow in the Shadow of Death?

THE PHANTOM.

No wind bloweth through the Hollow Land, though from the darkness beyond cometh a faint sighing.

THE SOUL.

Dead prayers — dead hopes — dead dreams!

[A long silence: and still the twain move down the sombre avenues of the wood. There is no sound, no stir — only the fall of leaves forever and ever.]

THE PHANTOM.

A great weakness is come upon me. I can fare no further.

THE SOUL.

[*Terrified.*] Leave me not alone! Leave me not! Leave me not!

THE PHANTOM.

Behold, another cometh. I perish.

[The Soul stretcheth out its hands to its fellow, but nought can stay the fading and the falling of the leaf. From another avenue come two figures, the one leading the other.]

THE PHANTOM OF THE WOMAN.

I am weary of the long quest. As a leaf goeth before the wind, I go.

THE SOUL OF THE WOMAN.

Leave me not alone! Leave me not! Leave me not!

[The Soul of the Woman stretcheth out its hands to its fellow, but nought can stay the fading and the falling of the leaf.]

THE SOUL OF THE MAN.

[*Whispering.*] O Death, give me thy sting! O Grave, suffer me to be thy victim!

THE SOUL OF THE WOMAN.

Where art thou? Where art thou — thou who wast myself?

[The Soul of the Man stops, trembles, listens intently. Through the profound silence the leaves fall, but none seeth; for the Soul of the Man is blind, and blind the Soul of the Woman.]

THE SOUL OF THE MAN.

[*In deep awe.*] Doth aught pass by?

[Profound silence.]

THE SOUL OF THE MAN.

For the love of life, I beseech thee, art thou, who art in the silence, even as I am?

[Profound silence.]

THE SOUL OF THE MAN.

[*In terror.*] It is Death.

[Profound silence.]

THE SOUL OF THE WOMAN.

[*In a low whisper.*] At last! At last!

[Slowly the Soul of the Woman advances. The Soul of the Man listens intently, and an awful fear is upon him.]

THE SOUL OF THE MAN.

Speak, thou that comest!

[There is a faint echo as of a rustling sound.]

It is leaves blown by the wind!

[There is an echo as of a rustling sound, nearer, and nearer, and nearer.]

What art thou?

[The faint rustling steps are close by. With tremulous, groping hands the Soul of the Man moves away, and then, paralyzed with terror, goes no further. He hears the faint steps encircling him, slowly, slowly. It is as of one groping blindly.]

THE SOUL OF THE WOMAN.

[*Whispering.*] It is he!

THE SOUL OF THE MAN.

Who spoke? Who comes? Oh, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?

[A low, thin sighing from afar in the darkness of the wood, as though of all dead prayers, dead hopes, dead dreams.]

THE SOUL OF THE MAN.

[*Crying shrilly in his terror.*] Who comes? Who comes?

[The Soul of the Woman draws nigh, till it stands beside the other. Then with out-

stretched arms she gropes for him whom she seeketh. The Soul of the Man cowers, sobbing in agony.]

THE SOUL OF THE WOMAN.

Thou knowest.

THE SOUL OF THE MAN.

Oh, God! Oh, God!

THE SOUL OF THE WOMAN.

Yea, even so at the last, for death cometh unto all.

THE SOUL OF THE MAN.

Have pity upon me, Agatha! Hast thou come to slay?

THE SOUL OF THE WOMAN.

Thou knowest.

THE SOUL OF THE MAN.

Death! Death!

THE SOUL OF THE WOMAN.

I have waited long.

THE SOUL OF THE MAN.

My sin — my sin — is there no expiation?

THE SOUL OF THE WOMAN.

Yea, verily, at the last.

THE SOUL OF THE MAN.

Oh, inner heart of hell!

THE SOUL OF THE WOMAN.

There is no heaven and no hell but upon the earth. And unto some is heaven, and unto some is hell: but woe unto those by whom hell is wrought for another, for his end is undying death and the horror of the grave.

THE SOUL OF THE MAN.

Have mercy upon me!

THE SOUL OF THE WOMAN.

Thou wert my hell.

THE SOUL OF THE MAN.

Have mercy upon me!

THE SOUL OF THE WOMAN.

Thou didst take the fresh life and pollute it with evil — thou didst seek me out to defile me — thou didst fling me into the mire and trample upon me — thou didst laugh me to scorn and drag me through the depths — and at the last, when once, only once, one gleam of brightness, one gleam of joy, came to me, thou didst foul it as death corrupts the carrion of the body, and didst work for me woe within woe, and hell within hell.

[The Soul of the Man suddenly throws his arms on high as though to ward a blow: then stoops, and flees like the wind down a sombre avenue of the obscure wood. For minutes, for hours — he knoweth not, he careth not — he goeth thus. Then, all at once, he stops; for nearer, nearer, he hears

the sighing from the midmost of the darkness, the sighing as of dead prayers, dead hopes, dead dreams. Suddenly there is a faint sound as of blown leaves. It draweth near.]

THE SOUL OF THE WOMAN.

For thou hast wrought woe within woe for me, and hell within hell.

[The Soul of the Man staggers dumbly, stretches forth unavailing arms, and knoweth the agony of the second death. Then wildly, and with a triumphing cry —]

At the least I slew him — at the least I strangled him where he lay!

THE SOUL OF THE WOMAN.

Was it thus?

[With a strange perishing cry the Soul of the Woman springs upon the other, and, clasping with both hands, strangles the Soul of the Man.

And in the sombre twilight of the vast avenues of the wood there is no sound; and in the darkness nought stirs, save the leaves falling forever, forever. Only from afar, in the uttermost darkness, there is a low sighing, that passeth not, that changeth not, and is as the vanishing breath of dead prayers, dead hopes, dead dreams.]

The Passion of Père Hilarion.

SIRIA

Votre amour lui serait l'orage.

NURH

Je l'aime.

SIRIA

Malheur à lui.

NURH

Je l'aime.

SIRIA

Malheur à vous.

LE BARBARE.

The Passion of Père Hilarion.

[A small, dark room, opening from the Sacristy of the Church of Notre Dame, in the village of Haut-Pré, on the French side of the Meuse. In the room, which is windowless, there is no light save the dull, yellow flicker from an iron cruse suspended from the low roof. Nought else is visible save a small iron bell jutting out above the door, connected with the outside by a string passing through a hole in the highest panel, and, on the further wall, a heavy metal crucifix. On the floor a man, in a priest's robes, lies at full length, face downward. Every now and then a convulsive shudder passes over his frame. He has lain thus for long, uttering no words, but praying silently with a passion that rends him. At last, with a low, sobbing sigh, Hilarion the priest rises, stands passively for a few moments, and then slowly advances till he is close to the crucifix.]

HILARION.

Wilt Thou not hearken to my cry, O Thou who savest?

[A faint, dull resonance of his voice haunts the room for a few moments; then silence as of the tomb.]

HILARION.

[*With broken, supplicating voice.*] O Thou who hast passioned, wilt Thou not have pity upon me in this mine agony? Lord, Lord, wilt Thou not save? Lo, I am younger than Thou wert when Thy bloody sweat fell in Gethsemane! Have compassion upon me, O Christ compassionate! I am but a man, and the burden of my manhood, the bitter burden of my youth, is heavy upon me.

[The dull, fading echo of a human voice; then silence as of the grave.]

HILARION.

Speak, Lord.

Show me a sign!

O Thou who wast crucified for me, hearken!

O Friend, O Brother, O Heavenly Love, I beseech Thee!

Jesus, Son of Mary, wilt Thou not hear?

I cry to Thee, O Son of God!

I cry to Thee, O Son of Man!

[He bows his head, and waits for he knows not what, his lips twitching, and hands clasping and unclasping. Then, suddenly:]

What wilt Thou, O Son of Man? Am I not Thy Brother?

[Leaning forward, and speaking slowly:]

Art Thou dead indeed, O Thou who wast crucified?

[The dull beat of sound around the walls: then silence as of deep night.]

I perish!
Stretch forth Thine hand and save!
I perish!

[Faintly round the tomb-like walls breathes the echo of the word: Perish. Then silence, chill and still as death.]

I am but a man, O God!
I am but a man, O Christ!
My sin is oversweet, and the world calls me, and I die daily, hourly, yea, every bitter moment!

[With a fierce cry, and wild gesture with his arms:]

What wouldst Thou? Doth not my neck break beneath the yoke?

[Suddenly he throws his priestly robe from off him. Beneath he has but a garment of hair and coarse serge, girt round the waist by a long rope heavily knotted. This also he removes, and then winds one end of the rope round his right wrist. With swift sweep he swings the knotted rope above his head, and brings it down upon his quivering sides. Slowly and steadily the knotted rope rises, circles, falls; moment after moment, minute after minute. At the last, one, two, three of the great weals along the man's back and sides break, and the flesh hangs purple-red, and the blood runs in thin scarlet streams down his thighs. Then, with a low cry, he throws down the rope and sinks on his knees, quivering with agony and exhaustion.]

HILARION.

[*With a low, choking sob.*] "Come unto Me, ye that are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest."

[The bell over the door clangs loudly. The priest slowly rises, puts on his hair shirt and stanches the blood as best he can, girds the rope about his waist, and dons again his long black robes. He is calm now, and deathly pale. Before he leaves the Penitents' room he makes a grave obeisance before the crucifix, but in silence and with downcast eyes. He goes forth, and through the Sacristy to a side door, opening on to a wide, deserted village street. He stands in the doorway, looking out as in a dream. The day is far spent, and the shadows gather and lengthen. In an old inn, opposite, from an open window, comes a woman's joyous laughter. The priest does not move, and seems neither to hear nor to see. A little later, the deep voice of a man slowly chants to a strange, monotonous tune:]

"*Elle est retrouvée.*
Quoi? L'éternité.
C'est la mer allée.
Avec le soleil."[1]

[The priest Hilarion abruptly turns away, muttering, as though in fierce pain, Oh, God! Oh, God! He passes into the Sacristy, and stands idly by a desk, brooding on the thing that is in his mind. A bell suddenly rings again. The sacristan enters and says that a woman is at the third confessional, and asks for Father Hilarion. He slowly leaves, and walks down the aisle toward his place, with bent head and heavy steps. As he reaches the box he looks back through the church toward the altar, where a young priest is leisurely lighting the candles. Below his breath he mutters:]

[1] "Les Illuminations."

" C'est la mer allée
Avec le soleil."

[He enters the box and seats himself. A woman — veiled — tall, young, and with a figure of strange grace and beauty, is on her knees.]

HILARION.

[*Quietly.*] My daughter.

THE WOMAN.

[*Hurriedly.*] My father, my heart is . . .

HILARION.

[*Abruptly rising, but seating himself again.*] Anaïs !

ANAÏS.

Yes, Father Hilarion, it is I. No, no, I cannot call you so !

HILARION.

Hush ! Anaïs, God is pitiful. We will pray for His help, and that of His holy Son, and that of the Blessed Mary.

ANAÏS.

There is no help but in ourselves.

HILARION.

Here we are as shadows in a fevered dream. The voice of Eternity. . . .

[Stops abruptly, as in his ears rises an echo of the song:]

"L'eternite. . . .
C'est la mer allée
Avec le soleil."

ANAÏS.

My heart breaks. The time has come: I must speak — and you, Hilarion — No, no, you must stay! Father Hilarion, I command you, as my priest, as my spiritual director! I must confess.

[She removes her veil, and in Hilarion's face a flush rises and fades as he looks again upon a face of such rare, surpassing beauty that even in dreams, before he first saw it, he had never beheld one lovelier, aught so lovely.

An acolyte, with a tall wax taper, passing by again, hears the swift whispering, the low, ardent tones of a woman's voice: and, once or twice, the deep murmur of Father Hilarion.]

ANAÏS.

Better than the dream of heaven! He is my paradise!

HILARION.

My daughter, this love is madness!

ANAÏS.

Then better so. I am mad. Oh, are you a man? Do you not understand? I love him — I love him — I love him!

HILARION.

My daughter, you must tell me all. What is this secret thing that lies betwixt you and — and this man?

ANAÏS.

Hilarion!

HILARION.

[*Troubled.*] Anaïs, my daughter!

ANAÏS.

Hilarion!

[Hilarion half rises, then seats himself again. His face has grown paler, and his hand trembles.]

ANAÏS.

Oh, my God, how I love him! What is the world to me? What is this paradise you dream of, this heaven you preach? He is my heaven, my paradise, my heart's delight, my life itself, my very soul!

[Anaïs bends forward, but hides her face from Hilarion, and sobs convulsively. The priest stares fixedly above her head into the gloom of the church beyond the uncurtained doorway.]

HILARION.

[*In a low voice.*] Most Blessed Virgin-Mother, have pity!

[There is silence for some moments. Anaïs slowly lifts her head and looks at the priest, who still stares fixedly into the gloom.]

ANAÏS.

[*In a faint whisper.*] Beyond words! Beyond thought!

HILARION.

Mary, Mother of Pity, hearken!

ANAÏS.

[*Quivering, as she clasps her hands together.*] Life is a dream, and the dream is brief. O Love, Love, Love!

HILARION.

Mater Consolatrix, save, oh, save!

[The grating, long loose, gives way, and falls with a clang upon the stone floor. Tremulously the priest lets his hand fall upon the head of Anaïs. Suddenly she takes his icy hand in hers, aflame as with fever]

HILARION.

My daughter, it is a sin to love so wildly. Only to God. . . .

ANAÏS.

[*In a loud, mocking voice.*] Only to God!

HILARION.

Hush, my daughter. I . . .

ANAÏS.

Hilarion!

HILARION.

[*Speaking low and hurriedly.*] My daughter, I am a priest. Thou must speak to me as to thy spiritual father. I . . .

ANAÏS.

Three years ago, Hilarion . . .

HILARION.

Anaïs, Anaïs!

[Anaïs bows her head over the priest's hand, and her lips are pressed against it. His face is deathly pale, and on his forehead are drops of sweat. With a sudden movement he extricates his hand from her grasp.]

ANAÏS.

[*Murmuring.*] It is killing me!

HILARION.

[*With a great effort.*] My daughter, there is neither rest, nor peace, nor beauty, nor happiness, nor content, nor any weal whatever in this world, save in . . .

[Anaïs raises her head and looks at him. He speaks no further. There is deep silence in the church, save for the shuffling step of an old beggar-woman, who slowly moves through the dusk, and at last sinks wearily on her knees.]

THE BEGGAR-WOMAN.

[*Repeating a prayer of the Church.*] "For this is Thy Kingdom, and we are Thy children, O heavenly King!"

HILARION.

[*Mechanically.*] And we are Thy children!

ANAÏS.

[*With a low, shuddering voice.*] And *this* is Thy Kingdom!

[Hilarion rises suddenly, as if about to go.]

HILARION.

My daughter, confess to the Blessed Mary herself. She will give you peace.

ANAÏS.

There is no peace for me. I love him with all my heart and all my soul and all my life, and I know that he loves me beyond all his dreams of heaven and hell.

HILARION.

[*Hoarsely.*] Who is this man?

ANAÏS.

He is a priest.

HILARION.

[*Murmuring, half to himself.*] "He who transgresseth in this wise shall go down into the pit, and his undying death shall be terror beyond terror, and horror within horror."

ANAÏS.

And for one kiss from his lips I would barter this life; for one hour of love I would exchange

this dream of a Paradise that shall not be. He is my day of sunshine and joy, he is my night of mystery and beatitude.

HILARION.

[*Trembling.*] The curse shall lie heavy upon him. . . .

ANAÏS.

Oh, joy of life!

HILARION.

And upon you!

ANAÏS.

Oh, the glad sunlight, the free air, the singing of birds; everywhere, everywhere, the pulse of the world!

HILARION.

All that live shall die.

ANAÏS.

And the dead know not: and if perchance they dream, it is Life.

[The voice of the Beggar-woman sounds hoarsely in the deepening gloom:]

"For in this life nought availeth, and only in the grave —"

ANAÏS.

[*Whispering, as she draws closer to the aperture.*] Only in the grave! — O Heart of Love!

HILARION.

[*In a strained voice.*] And this man — this priest?

ANAÏS.

Thou knowest him.

HILARION.

Better for him that he had never been born. Better —

ANAÏS.

[*In a low, thrilling voice.*] Hilarion! Hilarion!

[The priest trembles as though in an ague Anaïs again whispers, "Hilarion!"]

HILARION.

[*Hurriedly.*] My daughter, I must go. I have to officiate.

ANAÏS.

For the last time, Hilarion.

HILARION.

Go, woman! We are in the hands of God. I —

ANAÏS.

I die to-night.

HILARION.

Anaïs!

ANAÏS.

[*With a passionate sob.*] My darling, my darling! O Love, Love, Love!

[A bell clangs suddenly, and a young priest enters the church from behind the altar, bearing a light.]

THE BEGGAR-WOMAN.

[*Mumbling loudly, as she rises to her feet.*] "For thine is the Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory — "

ANAÏS.

[*Whispering eagerly.*] Where? Where?

HILARION.

[*Slowly, and as if in a dream.*] By the bend of the river at Grand-Pré: where the Calvary of the seven willows is: an hour after moonrise.

[Anaïs hesitates a moment, then abruptly turns away and leaves the church. Hilarion passes into the aisle: walking slowly, with bent head, and lips moving as though in prayer. The young priest comes toward him.]

THE YOUNG PRIEST.

Is it well with thee, Hilarion, my brother? Thou seemest in the shadow of trouble.

HILARION.

[*Suddenly raising his head, and with a clear, ringing voice.*] It is well with me.

THE YOUNG PRIEST.

And thou hast peace?

HILARION.

Yea, at the last I have found peace.

THE YOUNG PRIEST.

May, too, the joy that likewise passeth understanding —

HILARION.

[*Interrupting, in a strange voice.*] Verily, it also hath come unto me at the last.

[He passes on, with head erect and flashing eyes. The young priest looks after him.]

THE YOUNG PRIEST.

He is a dreamer — but a saint.

HILARION.

[*To himself as he passes beyond the altar.*] Yea, the joy that likewise passeth understanding.

[The choristers are practising their chant of the day.]

Mère céleste de la Pitié!
De toute Eternité.

HILARION (*passes muttering*).

"*Elle est retrouvée.*
Quoi? L'éternité — "

[The choristers singing:]

On a retrouvé
O Mère bien-aimée,
Ton doux conseil —

HILARION (*slowly, as he passes from sight*).

" C'est la mer allée
Avec le soleil."

[Three hours later. The church is closed. The village is swathed in darkness, save for a few lights here and there. Across the great meadow that divides the village from the river moves a tall figure clothed in priest's robes. The dew upon the high grasses glistens with a faint sheen where swept by his skirts. A few emerald-green fireflies wander hither and thither through the gloom A breath of wind comes and goes, bearing with it a vague fragrance of hay and roses and meadow-sweet. Once the priest stops and listens; but he hears nothing save the distant barking of a dog, and, close by, the stealthy wash of flowing water. Beyond the marshes of Haut-Pré the moon has risen. The marsh-water gleams like amber in torchlight. The priest moves on. As he draws nearer the river he sees, looming in a confused mass through the obscurity, the group of seven willows in the front of which stands the great Calvary. A sudden short essay of song thrills through the dusk. Then the nightingale is still. As the priest approaches the willows their upper branches glow as with dull gold in the welling wave of moonrise. He descries the high ash-gray mass of the Calvary through their heavy boughs, and, beyond, the moving blackness, shot with furtive gleams and sudden spear-like shafts of pale light, of the river. He passes the willows and stops as he nears the

Calvary. He sees no one. Slowly moving forward, he stands on the bank of the river, and looks upon the dull, obscure flow of the water. Suddenly he turns and goes back to the Calvary, which he faces. A long, wavering shaft of moonlight illumes the woe-wrought face of the carven Christ. The priest stands with crossed arms, staring fixedly at the moonlit features of the God. The green fireflies wander fitfully betwixt him and the image: he sees them not. The nightingale gives three thrilling cries, passionate vibrations of forlornest music: he hears them not.

Through the tall dew-drenched grasses beyond there is a soft susurrus. The priest's ears are charmed, for still, with crossed arms, he stands staring fixedly at the tortured face of the dead God. Suddenly he starts, as, from beyond the mass of the Calvary, a fantastic shadow moves toward him. He steps aside, and through the thin, moon-illumined mist behind he sees Anaïs approach, the moonshine turning her hair to pale bronze and making her face as one of the water-lilies in the river.]

ANAÏS.

[*Eagerly advancing.*] Hilarion!

HILARION.

I am here.

ANAÏS.

[*With fierce fervor.*] Let the priest die! It is you — it is you, Hilarion — whom I meet here. At last! At last!

[Hilarion is silent, and neither advances nor makes any gesture. Anaïs hesitates, then comes close up to him and looks into his eyes.]

ANAÏS.

Hilarion, is it life or death?

[Abruptly the nightingale sends a low crescendo note throbbing through the moonlight.]

HILARION.

[*Whispering and slowly.*] *Life — or — death.*

[With rapture swells the song of the nightingale, intoxicated with a mad ecstasy.]

ANAÏS.

[*In a low voice.*] Ah, Hilarion, have you forgotten?

[Suddenly, with rapid diminutions, the nightingale's song sinks to a thin, aerial music: abruptly wells forth again: and then, in a moment, ceases absolutely. There is a faint beat of wings, a rustle, and then the bird swoops in slanting flight from the midfoliage, circles twice round the willow, and swiftly, as though an arrow, flies through the dusk across the river. Hilarion starts as though awakened from a trance.]

HILARION.

[*Wildly.*] Anaïs!

ANAÏS.

Hilarion! O my darling, my darling!

[She springs to his open arms, and, as he bends over her, kissing her passionately, she sees by the moongleam reflected from the Calvary how deathly white he is.]

HILARION.

[*With a hoarse sob.*] Heart of my heart — soul of my soul — my life — my joy — my heaven — my hell! Anaïs! — Anaïs!

ANAÏS.

[*Extricating herself from his savage grasp.*] Is it life or — death — Hilarion?

HILARION.

They are the same: it matters not.

ANAÏS.

The nightingale has gone to his mate — yonder!

HILARION.

Dear, if only —

ANAÏS.

In the cottage, on the other side of the river — Hilarion, there is no one there: it waits my brother Raoul's return: his clothes would fit you — he will not need them for months yet — he is still under arms. If they find your priest's robes in the river, they will know —

HILARION.

Sst! What is that?

ANAÏS.

It is the night-wind coming over the hay-fields from afar.

HILARION.

Did no one speak?

ANAÏS.

There is no one to speak. We are alone. None sees us but God.

HILARION.

[*With a swift shudder.*] No one sees us but God.

ANAÏS.

And He — He is so far away. He speaks not — He breathes not — He must be dead.

HILARION.

[*Wearily.*] He speaks not — He breathes not — He must be dead.

ANAÏS.

Is it not so? For —

HILARION.

It is even so.

ANAÏS.

And, dear, you have dreamed a long, bitter dream.

HILARION.

Ay, a long dream.

ANAÏS.

And the dawn is at hand. At last, at last! Oh, Hilarion!

HILARION.

Thou sayest it.

ANAÏS.

[*Suddenly sinking to her knees, sobbingly.*] My darling, forgive me! Hilarion, kill me!

HILARION.

Sst! What is that?

ANAÏS.

It is the night-wind creeping over the marshes of Haut-Pré.

HILARION.

[*Suddenly.*] Life! Life! beautiful Life! Anaïs, let us go.

[He clasps her left hand in his right, and both walk to the river's bank.]

HILARION.

Can we reach the other side in this high flood?

ANAÏS.

Yes, by swimming. Hark! there is no time to lose. I hear, across the marshes, the bells of Urle. The floods are rising.

[Hilarion slowly discards his priest's robes, and then, as by an afterthought, strips himself also of his penitent's garment and stands forth naked in the moonlight. He looks broodingly into the dark flood of water moving stealthily past. Anaïs rapidly throws off her things. He turns just as she stands forth in all her naked beauty, like a vision of embodied moonlight.]

HILARION.

Anaïs!

ANAÏS.

Because I too am drowned.

[Hilarion hesitates a moment, then steps to her, takes her in his arms, kisses her wildly again and again. Then saying simply, *Come*, he clasps her hand and they both enter the water. When Anaïs is breast-high they stop. Hilarion stoops and kisses her long upon the lips.]

HILARION.

If there be no morrow —

ANAÏS.

Dear, with you I fear neither life nor death. Neither death nor life.

[They enter the black shadow of midstream, and silently swim side by side, till at last they gain the opposite bank. There, hand in hand, they stand a brief while, breathing heavily, and looking back upon the boundary they have crossed forever. As the moonshine slowly waves northward, Anaïs, turning, descries the vague outline of her brother's unoccupied cottage. Stealthily she withdraws her hand from Hilarion's clasp and noiselessly slips from his side, through the deep shadows, toward the cottage. He stands alone, white in the moonlight, passive as a statue. Suddenly he gives a hoarse cry, leaps down the bank and into the water again. With swift, fierce strokes he swims rapidly across the river, bearing hard against the current, but swerving neither to right nor to left. As he nears

the opposite bank he staggers, clutching the reeds: then, stooping, half-climbs, half-leaps up the bank, and, having gained it, walks swiftly toward the Calvary. The moonlight is now all about it, except at the head of the crucified God, which is in deep shadow. Hilarion the priest stands in front of the Calvary, staring fixedly upward. Slowly he advances, and stands on the highest of the three low steps of the pedestal of the cross, and, straining every muscle, scrutinizes the carven face of agony.]

HILARION.

[*In a hoarse whisper.*] Behold, the God is verily dead.

[Nothing stirs in the silence, in the moonlight, in the darkness.]

HILARION.

Wilt Thou save, even now, O my Lord?

[Nothing stirs in the silence of the moonlight, of the darkness.]

HILARION.

[*In a loud, vibrant voice.*] Wilt Thou save Thyself, Thou Lord without lordship, Thou fallen God!

[In the darkness, in the moonlight, nothing stirs.]

HILARION.

[*Furiously.*] Ah, Thou dead God!

[Hilarion the priest leaps forward, and, with wild gestures and savage violence, tears the crucified figure from the cross and hurls

it to the ground. Then, in panting silence, he sways to and fro with his arms clasp round the cross, which at last yields, breaks, and falls to the ground. He seizes it and drags it to the bank and thrusts it into the river, silently watching it sink half way in the ooze of the reeds. Then returning, with a low, triumphing cry, he grasps the carven figure, and, having reached the bank again, lifts the image above his head, poises it a moment, while the moonshine clothes him as with a garment, and then, with desperate fury, hurls it with a great effort far amid-stream.

The moonlight lies like a white transparent cloud along the bank, and along the nearer half of the flood: on the further side the darkness is now profound, and the river seems narrowed to a stream. Far off, in the marshes, the frogs croak: the crickets in the distant meadows shrill incessantly over the pastures a fern-owl hawks with a strange choking cry. Otherwise, silence and utter peace. The man draws himself up to his full height, turns toward the unseen village beyond the great meadow, silver-white with moonshine and dew, and raises his right arm menacingly. But he lets it drop, speaking no word. Then, turning again, he moves slowly toward and into the river. The moonlight turns the white skin of his shoulder into amber, as he swims across the flood. Then he passes into the darkness. In profound darkness he swims toward the shore: in profound darkness he scales the opposite bank: through the profound darkness beyond, his voice, hoarse, yet vibrant and echoing, calls with mad joy:]

Anaïs! Anaïs!

The Birth of a Soul.

Enter with me into the dark zone of the human soul.

EMILIA PARDO BAZÀN.

The Birth of a Soul.

[A bedroom, austerely furnished, in an old city of Flanders. To the left, a "Spanish throne," as such beds are called — heavy with sombre woodwork and huge all-length canopy; with tall, dark, thick curtains at the top and at the bottom; and approached by three low wooden steps belonging to and running the whole length of the bed. In the bed a woman, about to give birth to a child. Kneeling at a chair betwixt the head of the bed and the bare table with dull green cloth, on which is a low-shaded reading lamp, is a man, the father of the unborn child. To his left, a Sister of Mercy, also kneeling, but at the lowest of the three steps of the bed. To his right, kneeling at a chair near the table, a priest. The door of the room, to the right behind the bed, conspicuous by its black-oak panelling. At the opposite side of the room from the bed: to the right, a tall, fantastically carved black-oak clock, with clay-white face, with hands broken and dangling this way and that: beyond it, to the left, in a deep-set recess, an old Flemish window.]

THE PRIEST.

[*Kneeling at a chair, praying aloud.*] O God, may the child that cometh unto us from Thee

be blessed by Thee to purity and strength. May he come as a scourge to the wrong-doer, as a message of peace to the righteous.

THE MAN.

[*Kneeling at a chair near the head of the bed, praying silently.*] O God, may the child that is to be born to us not be a man-child. Already, already, O God, the curse that is within me has descended into the third generation.

THE PRIEST.

[*Praying aloud.*] And if the child be a woman-child, O Lord, may she be a lamp of light in dark places, a godly presence among the evil.

THE WOMAN.

[*Praying in the silence.*] O God, may the child that is within me not be a woman-child, so that she may never know the bitterness of shame and all the heritage of woman's woe.

ANOTHER.

[*Unseen and unheard: in the deep shadow at the end of the bed.*] Thou living thing within the womb, when thou art born I shall dwell within thee as thy soul. And the sin of the woman, the which I am, shall lie like a canker-worm within thy heart: and the evil of the man, the which I am, shall eat into thy inmost being. And thou shalt grow in corruption. And thy end shall be nothingness.

THE PRIEST.

[*Aloud.*] Have mercy, O God, upon this immortal soul!

THE OTHER.

[*In the shadow.*] For in the shadow of hell wast thou conceived, and out of the horror of the grave I come.

THE SISTER OF MERCY.

[*Aloud, kneeling betwixt the table and the bed.*] Amen! Hear, O Blessed Mary; hear, oh, hear!

THE MAN.

Have pity upon us!

THE MOTHER.

O Christ, son of Mary, save me!

THE PRIEST.

[*Aloud.*] For it is Thine!

THE SISTER OF MERCY.

Thine!

THE OTHER.

[*In the shadow.*] Mine!

[Silence for some minutes. The clock ticks loudly. A sound as of an opening and closing door somewhere. The Priest looks up for a moment, thinking he heard someone rise from the deep-set window-seat at the far end of the chamber and come slowly across the room. But he sees no one. He bends his head again, and prays inaudibly.]

THE MAN.

[*With his face buried in his hands.*] If it be possible, let this thing —

[Stops, as there comes from the bed a sound of low, shaken sobs.]

THE WOMAN.

[*Below her breath.*] . . . Even so, Virgin Mother, Most Pure!

THE OTHER.

[*In the shadow.*] Yea, so.

[Again a prolonged silence. All wait, knowing the woman's agony is at hand. The right hand of the father shakes as though he were in an ague. The sweat on his forehead moves slowly down his face in large, heavy drops.]

THE MAN.

[*Suddenly.*] Who knocks?

THE PRIEST.

No one knocked.

THE WOMAN.

[*In a high, faint, perishing voice.*] Who knocks?

[The sister of Mercy rises and goes to the door. Opens and closes it, saying, as she returns to her post:]

THE SISTER OF MERCY.

There is no one there.

THE WOMAN.

[*Shrilly.*] Who came in just now?

THE SISTER OF MERCY.

No one. It is I.

THE WOMAN.

[*In a low sighing tone.*] It is the end.

THE OTHER.

[*In the shadow.*] It is the beginning of the end.

[A prolonged silence, save for the endless moaning and occasional convulsive cries of the woman. At last the Priest rises, and sits by the table. He pulls the shaded lamp towards him, and begins to read from a book:]

THE PRIEST.

Unto us a child is born —

[The woman sits up convulsively in bed, with her face turned almost round upon her right shoulder, her eyes staring in horror.]

THE WOMAN.

Who touched me?

THE SISTER OF MERCY.

[*Rising.*] Hush!

[She comes over to the bed, gently persuades the woman to lie back, and then kneels beside the bed.]

THE SISTER OF MERCY.

There is no one here but those who love you.
There is no one here but those whom you see.

THE OTHER.

[*In the shadow.*] And I!

[In the heavy curtains behind the bed a current of air seems to move for a moment.]

THE WOMAN.

[*White with fear, whispering.*] Who sighed behind me?

THE SISTER OF MERCY.

There is no one here but those who love you.
There is no one here but those whom you see.

[Again silence, but for the monotonous moaning of the woman. The clock strikes the quarter. The man rises, goes to the window, stares forth steadily, then returns.]

THE MAN.

There is no one there.

[The woman's limbs move slowly beneath the coverlet. Her breathing is high and quick, though ever and again it stops abruptly. Her hands wander restlessly to and fro, ceaselessly plucking at nothing.]

THE SISTER OF MERCY (*in a low voice*).

Ave Maria!

[The woman's hands never cease their pluck, pluck, plucking at nothing.]

THE PRIEST.

[*Muttering to himself.*] It will soon be over.

THE OTHER.

[*In the shadow.*] It has begun.

[The man rises, goes to the window, stares forth steadily, then returns.]

THE MAN.

There is no one there.

[The woman's hands cease their wandering sidelong pluck, pluck, pluck. She raises both hands slowly, rigid, emaciated. When they are above her head they suddenly fall. The right strikes the wooden edge of the bed, and hangs stiffly by its side. The Sister of Mercy replaces it, the woman watching her fixedly.]

THE PRIEST.

[*Starting up suddenly, and trembling.*] My brethren, if so be —

THE MAN.

[*Pointing.*] What — who — is that?

THE PRIEST.

My son, there is nought there?

THE MAN.

Who stirred in the deep shadow at the end of the bed?

THE SISTER OF MERCY.

Hush! for the love of God! The woman is in labour.

[There is a sound as of some one drowning in a morass: a horrible struggling and choking.]

THE PRIEST.

[*Holding up a small crucifix.*] O God, have pity upon us!

THE SISTER OF MERCY.

O Christ, have pity upon us!

THE MAN.

[*Peering into the shadowy gloom at the end of the bed.*] O Thou, have pity upon us!

THE PRIEST.

[*Chanting.*] O Death, where is thy sting!

THE OTHER.

[*In the shadow.*] In thy birth, O Life!

THE PRIEST.

[*Chanting.*] O Grave, where is thy victory!

THE OTHER.

[*In the shadow.*] I am come.

There is a sudden cessation of sound. The Sister of Mercy lifts something from the bed. There is a low, thin wail. The man does not see, and does not seem to hear. He kneels at his chair, but his head is turned away, and he stares fixedly toward the window.]

THE SISTER OF MERCY.

She is dead.

THE PRIEST.

O God, receive her soul! O Christ, have pity upon her! O most Holy Mother of God, have mercy upon her!

THE OTHER.

[*In the shadow.*] Woman, abide yet a little. Give me thy life.

THE SISTER OF MERCY.

The child liveth. It is a man-child.

THE PRIEST.

[*Touching the man.*] It is a man-child.

THE MAN.

[*Still staring fixedly at the window, repeats, in a slow, dull voice.*] It is a man-child.

[The man slowly rises, turns, and walks to the bedside. He stares upon the dead face.]

THE PRIEST.

[*Ending rapidly.*] As it was in the beginning —

THE SISTER OF MERCY.

Is now —

A VOICE.

[*Near the window.*] And ever shall be.

THE PRIEST.

[*Trembling.*] Who spoke?

THE SISTER OF MERCY.

No one.

[The Priest falls on his knees and, covering his eyes, prays fervently. The man lifts the child from the Sister's arms. Its eyes open upon him. As he looks at it his face grows ashy pale. His whole body trembles. His eyes seem as though they would strain from their sockets.]

THE PRIEST.

[*Rising, and in a loud, clear voice.*] O Death, where is thy sting!

[The man looks at what was the woman.]

THE PRIEST.

O Grave, where is thy victory!

THE MAN.

[*Looking on the face of the child, who is fixedly staring beyond him.*] Here.

A Northern Night.

That dark hour, obscurely minatory, in the tide of two lives . . . when, unforeseen and unrecognized, Love and Death come in at the flood together.

SIWÄARMILL.

A Northern Night.

[An hour after midnight. A desolate district of Northern Scotland, hemmed in by mountains and innumerable lochs and tarns and deep, narrow streams. In the remotest part of it, miles from the nearest hut, a semi-ruinous 'keep,' Iorsa Tower, at the extreme north end of Loch Malon. It is dead of winter. For weeks the land has been ice-bound. The deer and the hill-sheep are starving; only the corbies and eagles gorge their full. Iorsa Keep stands out black against the snow-covered wilderness. A dull, red light, high up, like a staring eye, gleams under a projecting ledge. There is no sound but the occasional crack of the bitter frost, and, at intervals, the wind pressing in the frozen surface of the snow depths. In the one habitable room sit two figures, before a rude fire of pine-logs. Most of the room is in deep shadow. The flickering flame-light discloses a small, deep-set window to the left. Between it and the hearth-place, and close to the wall, a bed, startlingly white in the midst of the gloom. Over it, on the wall, the flying lights flash momently on old disused weapons.

In all the wild lands around there is not a living soul except the twain who sit before the fire.]

MALCOLM.

The black frost is about to break: I hear the wind ruffling the snow.

HELDA.

Is it the snow?

MALCOLM.

Go to the window and look out. You will see the thin, frozen snow beginning to fly along the loch like spray. The wind rises.

HELDA.

No; I am afraid.

MALCOLM.

[*Rising.*] Then I will go. . . . See, the window is open, and you can now hear the wind.

HELDA.

Oh, how cold it is.

MALCOLM.

The wind is blowing from behind: it did not come in at the window.

HELDA.

Yes, yes, it did: and. . . .

MALCOLM.

[*Returning to Helda's side.*] Is not the fire comforting? The logs are red-hot, sparkling and sputtering.

[Helda, slightly shivering, glances at him, and then draws nearer to the fire.]

MALCOLM.

Are you not glad we are no longer on the ice?

HELDA.

Yes: oh, yes, yes.

MALCOLM.

And that we are here at last, we two! Oh, Helda!

HELDA.

Yes, I am glad that we are no longer upon the ice.

MALCOLM.

Why do you repeat yourself, Helda?

[Helda, in silence, looks straight before her into the fire.]

MALCOLM.

Why are you glad?

HELDA.

Because I feared that we were followed.

MALCOLM.

Who would have followed us? Who could have followed us?

[Helda stares fixedly, and in silence, at the glowing embers.]

MALCOLM.

No one followed us.

HELDA.

Thrice, when I looked behind my shoulder, I saw a shadow flying along the ice.

MALCOLM.

The half-moon was as ruddy as a torch-flame. We should have seen any one who followed us. And when we reached the frozen loch we could see all around.

HELDA.

It was there I saw the flying shadow.

MALCOLM.

I heard no one. I heard nothing.

HELDA.

Nor I, except the hiss of the wind blowing the ice-spray over the loch.

MALCOLM.

There was no wind.

HELDA.

The ice-spray flew before the blast. I saw a little cloud of it behind.

MALCOLM.

There was no wind. And now, I have told you, the wind is from behind the house.

HELDA.

Then it blew toward the house.

MALCOLM.

Well, it does not matter. 'The wind cometh and goeth.'

HELDA.

[*Slowly, and as to herself.*] It cometh — and goeth.

MALCOLM.

I wonder what they are doing at the castle. The dancers will have gone now. Perhaps they will be putting out the lights.

HELDA.

If we have been missed?

MALCOLM.

No one will miss us. But, if so, what then? My father knows that those of us for whom there is not room in the castle will sleep for the night in some of the farm-houses near. As for you, if you are missed they will think you have skated back to Castle Urquhar. No one can know. We are as safe here, my beautiful Helda, as though we were in the grave.

HELDA.

Hush! Do not say such things.

MALCOLM.

Darling, we are safe here. We are miles from the nearest hut even. No one ever comes here.

HELDA.

Malcolm, I wish — I wish —

MALCOLM.

What is it, Helda? Speak.

HELDA.

I wish we had not done this thing. He —

MALCOLM.

Who?

HELDA.

You know whom I mean: Archibald Graeme.

MALCOLM.

Never mind that old man. You will have more than enough of him soon. Is it still fixed that the marriage is to take place ten days hence?

HELDA.

He is a good man. He has saved my father from ruin.

MALCOLM.

Will he take you away? Will he take you to the South-country?

HELDA.

And he loved my mother. He loves me because he loved her.

MALCOLM.

He is soon to be so passing rich, Helda. I am to starve, to famish for you, Helda.

HELDA.

Dear, I love you with all my heart and with all my soul. You know it. I have given you my secret joy, my true life, my whole love, myself.

MALCOLM.

Love like ours would redeem . . .

HELDA.

Hark!

MALCOLM.

It is the wind.

HELDA.

It blows again across the loch, against the window.

MALCOLM.

No, dear Helda, it is but an eddy. The wind rises more and more, but from the north.

HELDA.

[*Whispering.*] Some white snow was blown up against the window!

MALCOLM.

Dearest, you are imagining. No snow can blow against this window with the wind as it is, for the gable shuts us off.

HELDA.

[*Trembling, and with hands claspt.*] I saw a round drift of something pale as snow pressed against the window.

MALCOLM.

I will convince you.

[Rises, and opens the window. There is no snow on the sill. The wind strikes the Keep behind with a dull boom, and rushes overhead with an incessant screaming sound. But in front all is as quiet as though it were a windless night.]

MALCOLM.

See, dear, there is no snow: and hark! the wind blows steadily southward.

[Closes the window, and returns to Helda's side.]

HELDA.

Malcom, you will not be angry with me — if I — if I . . .

MALCOLM.

What?

HELDA.

If I pray. I have not prayed for a long time from my heart. To-night I fear the darkness without a prayer. I will say no words, but I must pray.

MALCOLM.

Pray if you will, Helda.

HELDA.

Yes, . . . yes; . . . I must pray!

MALCOLM.

Dear, as you will. You would be alone? . . . See: I shall be in the corridor outside. Call me when you wish me to return. But have mercy on me, sweetheart! Remember that there is no fire out there, and that the air is chill along those stone flags.

[Rises and leaves the room. He has scarcely closed the door ere Helda cries loudly:]

HELDA.

Malcolm! Malcolm! Come at once! Malcolm!

MALCOLM.

[*Abruptly re-entering.*] What is it? . . . what is it, Helda? Has anything frightened you?

HELDA.

Yes, the whiteness at the window: the snow at the window!

MALCOLM.

Oh, Helda, Helda, there is no snow at the window.

HELDA.

Malcolm, are there any birds that fly by night?

MALCOLM.

The owls fly by night, but not at dead of winter.

HELDA.

No bats, no moths?

MALCOLM.

No.

HELDA.

When I looked out at the window when we came in here I saw that there were no trees near, and that no ivy grows up this side of Iorsa.

MALCOLM.

There is none.

HELDA.

[*In a low, strained voice.*] Malcolm, it was as though there were birds tapping at the window.

MALCOLM.

You are nervous, darling. Come, let us forget the dark night, and the wind, and the bitter cold. *We* are here, and the world is ours to-night.

HELDA.

Hush! There it is again!

MALCOLM.

That sound is in the room.

HELDA.

Malcolm! Malcolm!

MALCOLM.

My foolish Helda, how easy it would be to frighten you. It is only a little insect in the wall.

HELDA.

The death-watch?

MALCOLM.

Yes, the death-watch.

HELDA.

[*Shuddering.*] It is a horrible name. *Sst!* How the wind wails.

MALCOLM.

I hope . . .

HELDA.

What?

MALCOLM.

I hope it does not bring too much snow.

HELDA.

Why?

MALCOLM.

We are a long way from home, Helda.

HELDA.

Do you fear that we cannot get back if the snow fall heavily?

MALCOLM.

If it drifts we cannot skate. But there is no snow yet. There will be none before morning.

HELDA.

Darling, I have lost all fear. I am with you. That is enough. If it were not for my father's sake, I wish we could die to-night!

MALCOLM.

My beautiful Helda, my darling, my heart's delight!

[They stand awhile together by the fire, she leaning against him, and his left arm round her. A log falls in. Another gives way with a crash. There is only a red gulf of pulsating glow, with over the last charred log pale blue frost-flames flickering fantastically. Suddenly they turn, and look into each other's eyes. Malcolm's shine strangely in the half-light, and his face has grown pale. A tremulous flush wavers upon Helda's face. His breathing comes quick and hard. She gives a low, scarce-heard sob.]

MALCOLM.

My darling!

HELDA.

Oh, Malcolm, Malcolm!

[An hour passes. . . .
The fire has fallen in, and smoulders beneath such a weight of ash and charred wood that the room is in complete darkness. Outside, utter silence. The wind has suddenly lulled. Malcolm and Helda lie in each other's arms, but neither has spoken for some time.]

HELDA.

Malcolm!

MALCOLM.

My darling!

HELDA.

You will not go to sleep? I am so happy, oh, I am so happy, here in your arms, Malcolm; but I should be afraid if you slept.

MALCOLM.

Do you think I would sleep, Helda, to-night of all nights in my life?

HELDA.

[*After a long silence.*] It is so still.

MALCOLM.

The wind has suddenly fallen.

HELDA.

Move your arm, dear. Malcolm, . . . Malcolm, I wish it were not so dark! I never knew such darkness.

MALCOLM.

The fire smoulders. It will not go out. When we rise, I shall blow the flame into life again.

HELDA.

I wish it were not so profoundly, so fearfully dark!

MALCOLM.

Sweetheart, if you are unhappy, I will stir up the heart of it at once. I will do it now.

[Rises from the bed, and stirs the smouldering fire. A flame shoots up and illumines the room for a moment. Malcolm places a fresh log in the glowing hollow he has disclosed, and returns to Helda. She is cowering against the wall, and shivering with fear. As soon as he is beside her she clings close to him, and moans faintly.]

MALCOLM.

Helda, Helda, what ails you? What is it?

HELDA.

Malcolm, let us go; let us go at once!

MALCOLM.

Dearest, do not be so frightened at nothing. Are we to lose this precious night together because of a death-watch ticking in the wall, or a blown leaf tapping against the window?

HELDA.

Oh, Malcolm, what was it?

MALCOLM.

What? When?

HELDA.

When you rose and stirred the logs, and the flame shot up for a moment, I saw . . .

[Stops, shuddering.]

MALCOLM.

Tell me, darling. . . .

HELDA.

I saw some one — a — a — something — rise from the end of the bed and slip into the darkness.

MALCOLM.

Oh, foolish Helda, to be so easily frightened by my shadow. Of course my shadow followed me, dear!

HELDA.

It was when you were at the fire! The — the — shadow was not yours.

MALCOLM.

Ah, there is a wild bird fluttering in that little heart of yours!

HELDA.

Dear, when you kiss me so I fear nothing more. Nothing — nothing — nothing!

MALCOLM.

Nothing — nothing — nothing!

HELDA.

Ah, yes, hold me close, close! My darling, I have given you all. Nothing now can come between us!

MALCOLM.

Nothing, my beautiful Helda. And, dear [*whispering*], you do not wish to go yet? The morning is still far off.

HELDA.

[*Whispering lower still, and with a low, glad cry.*] Not now, not now!

[Profound silence, save for their sighs and kisses.]

MALCOLM.

[*In a low voice.*] And when old Archibald Graeme . . .

HELDA.

[*Starting half up.*] Hark! What was that?

MALCOLM.

[*Listening.*] It was nothing. Perhaps the wind rose and fell.

HELDA.

[*Fearfully.*] If it was the wind, it is in the house! I hear it lifting faintly from step to step.

MALCOLM.

[*Listening more intently.*] There must be wind behind the house. It is causing draughts to play through the chinks and in the bare rooms.

HELDA.

[*Sitting up in bed and staring through the darkness.*] It is in the corridor!

MALCOLM.

In the corridor?

HELDA.

Yes; that low, ruffling sound.

MALCOLM.

The wind is rising.

HELDA.

[*Whispering.*] Malcolm, don't move; don't stir. It is at the door.

MALCOLM.

I hear it: it is a current of air swirling the dust along the passage.

HELDA.

[*With a low cry.*] Oh, Malcolm, it is in the room! What is it that is moving so softly to and fro?

MALCOLM.

[*Springing from the bed.*] Ah, I thought so. The window is open: I must have left the latch unfastened. There: it will not open again!

HELDA.

The window was not open before, Malcolm.

MALCOLM.

Ha! there is the snow at last! I hear its shovelling sound against the gable. Darling, we must go soon.

HELDA.

[*Sobbing with fear.*] It is in the room! It is in the room! It is in the room!

MALCOLM.

There is no one here but ourselves, Helda. That sound is the shoving of the snow along the walls.

HELDA.

It is some one moving round the room. O Christ, help us!

MALCOLM.

Listen!

[They both sit up, listening intently. For nearly three minutes there is profound silence.]

HELDA.

Oh, my God!

MALCOLM.

Be still, for God's sake! Do not move.

[Utter silence.]

HELDA.

[*Shudderingly.*] Ah-h-h-h!

MALCOLM.

[*In a low voice.*] Some one is at the door.

HELDA.

[*In a dull echo.*] Some one is at the door.

MALCOLM.

[*Whisperingly.*] Quick, Helda! rise and dress.

HELDA.

I cannot. Oh, my God, what is it that moves about the room? What is within the door? Oh, Malcolm, save me!

MALCOLM.

Let me go! Do not be frightened: I shall move that log, and then we shall see.

[Rises, and pulls the log back. A shower of sparks ascends: and then a clear, yellow flame shoots up and illumines the room. There is a wild wail of wind in the chimney, and then a long, querulous sighing sound, culminating in a rising moan. A handful of sleety snow is dashed by a wind-eddy against the window.]

MALCOLM.

Arise!

HELDA.

Come to me. I —

[Helda cowers back in her bed, with lips drawn taut with terror and eyes staring wildly.]

MALCOLM.

[*Suddenly, in a loud, imperative voice.*] Who is there?

[Dead silence.]

MALCOLM.

Who is there?

[Dead silence.]

HELDA.

[*With a strange, sobbing cry.*] It is Death!

[She falls back in a death-like swoon.]

MALCOLM.

Oh, my God!

[He takes Helda in his arms, kissing her passionately. Slowly, at last, she opens her eyes.]

MALCOLM.

My darling, my darling! Be frightened no more, Helda! . . . Dearest, it is I, . . . Malcolm! . . . There is no one there.

HELDA.

[*Whispering.*] Oh, Malcolm, did you hear what he said?

MALCOLM.

You were frightened by the stillness; . . . by the wind; . . . the wandering eddies of air in this old place; . . . by . . . by . . .

HELDA.

God grant it! Dear, we have paid bitterly for our joy.

MALCOLM.

Not too much, Helda! I would go through Hell itself for such rapture as we have known.

HELDA.

My darling, I can never face him — I can never face him, with his fierce, penetrating eyes! Ah, would to God that we two could go away together, and be man and wife, and forget him — forget all!

MALCOLM.

Even yet, Helda —

HELDA.

No, no, no! You know it cannot be. We have sinned enough. Malcolm, are you *sure* no one is there?

MALCOLM.

There is not a living soul in this place besides ourselves. . . . But we had best go now, dear. In another hour it will be daylight.

[He kisses her tenderly, and then goes to the fire and stirs it afresh, hurriedly puts on his things, goes to the door, opens it, and, staring into the dark corridor, listens intently. Helda dresses herself rapidly, and erelong glides to his side.]

HELDA.

Shall we go, Malcolm? It is so dark.

MALCOLM.

I will get the torch.

[Goes and returns with it lit.]

MALCOLM.

Let us go. Take my hand.

[They descend the long, dark, winding stairway. The torch spurtles and goes out.]

MALCOLM.

[*Suddenly.*] Who goes there?

[No answer.]

MALCOLM.

Who goes there?

HELDA.

[*Clinging close.*] Some one brushed past me just now! . . . Oh, Malcolm!

[Holding each other's hands they stumble on, and, more by chance than foreknowledge, reach the door that leads into the court. They search awhile for the skates they left there, but in the dark do not find them. At last they are found. They go out, cross the stone court, and as they go through the

old ruined gate they look up. A brilliant, red light gleams through the window of the room they had been in.

Hand in hand, they hasten along the snow-banked track till they reach the loch. There they hurriedly put on their skates. In less than a minute thereafter they are flying along the black ice, his left hand holding her right.]

HELDA.

Quick, Malcolm!

MALCOLM.

We cannot go quicker. The snow has drifted a little here.

HELDA.

Is that the wind following us?

MALCOLM.

There is no wind. Make haste. We must not stop.

[After a brief interval:]

HELDA.

Malcolm! Malcolm! there is some one else on the loch!

MALCOLM.

Impossible. Come, Helda, be brave. It will be daylight soon. In five minutes more we 'll have crossed the reach, and then have only the Water of Sorrow to skate up till we come to the Black Kyle.

HELDA.

It is coming this way! He — he — the skater — is coming this way!

MALCOLM.

He must skate well if he overtake *us*, Helda! Come, the ice is clearer again. I see it: it is blacker than the night.

HELDA.

Are we going in the right direction?

MALCOLM.

Yes, yes; come on, come on!

[They fly along at their utmost speed. Suddenly Helda sways, and almost falls. Malcolm supports her, and they skate on, but more slowly.]

HELDA.

[*Faintly.*] Some one passed us!

MALCOLM.

[*Eagerly.*] Look yonder! I can see the shadowy ridge of Ben Malon! It is day!

HELDA.

I can go no further. Oh, hold me, Malcolm.

[He takes her in his arms. She slowly recovers. Gradually an ashy grey gloom prevails to the eastward. They wait silently. Erelong they see the whole mass of Ben Malon looming through the dusk. The ice gleams like white salt in a dark cavern. Soon the loch is visible for some

distance; and, a short way beyond them, the narrow mile-long reach of it known as the Water of Sorrow.]

MALCOLM.

Helda, dearest, can you go on now? The night is over. . . .

HELDA.

[*With a low, choking sob.*] Thank God, thank God!

[They skate on. The dawn vaguely and slowly advances. Soon they enter the frozen Water of Sorrow. The few trees along its banks are still blotches of black. Neither speaks, but, hand in hand, both sway onward as scythes tirelessly sweeping through leagues of grass. At last they reach the end of the Water of Sorrow, and enter the Black Kyle.]

MALCOLM.

In ten minutes, Helda, we 'll be on Urquhar Water, and then you will be almost at home. Look behind! A white mist is sweeping along after us.

HELDA.

I dare not look behind.

MALCOLM.

Why?

HELDA.

I dare not look behind.

[With strained eyes and white, rigid face, Helda skates on, Malcolm still holding her hand. The white wreath of mist gains on

them. Helda's breath comes quick and hard, but she increases her speed. Malcolm sways as he strives to keep up with her. They swing out of the Black Kyle and into Urquhar Water. A small islet looms in front of them. Dimly through the gray, chill gloom rises the rugged outlines of Urquhar. The loch forks, — one fork toward the castle; the other, and longer, to the right.]

HELDA.

[*Gaspingly.*] At last!

MALCOLM.

Sst! There is some one coming down the Narrow Water!

HELDA.

Quick! quick! Let us gain the islet!

[They reach it, and Helda sinks exhausted among a bed of reeds, which crackle loudly. Malcolm has just time to recover his balance and to swing round, when a skater dashes from the hidden Narrow and flies across the broad and towards the islet. He sees Malcolm, and hastes in his direction, but without coming right for him. Malcolm recognizes him as Martin Brooks, a groom from Urquhar.]

MALCOLM.

[*Shouting.*] Ho! Martin! Martin! Stop a moment! Where are you going? Is the side-way open?

MARTIN.

[*Calling, as he swerves for a moment or two.*] I can't stop, sir! I am off across the

loch and through the Glen of Dusker to fetch Dr. James Graeme.

MALCOLM.

What is wrong?

MARTIN.

[*Shouting, with his hand to his mouth.*] In the dead o' night we heard a wild cry, but no one knew what it was. An hour ago or less the dogs were howling through the house . . . We found him, sitting straight up and staring at us, with an awful look on his face, stone dead. He must a' died at midnight.

MALCOLM.

Who? Who?

MARTIN.

[*Poising a moment, ere he swings away again.*] Archibald Graeme!

[His flying figure disappears in the gloom. The mist-wreath comes rapidly out of the Kyle towards the islet. A thin snow begins to fall.]

HELDA.

[*Shaken with convulsive sobs.*] Oh, God! Oh, God! Oh, God!

The Black Madonna.

Que douces, ces heures lunaires . . .
Qu'horribles, ces heures nocturnes !

LE BARBARE.

The Black Madonna.

[The fire of the setting sun turns the extreme of the forest into a wave of flame. A river of withdrawing light pervades the aisles of the ancient trees, and, falling over the shoulder of a vast, smooth slab of stone that rises solitary in an open place, pours in a flood across the glade and upon the broken columns and inchoate ruins of what in immemorial time had been a gigantic temple, the fane of a perished god, or of many gods. As the flaming disc rapidly descends, the stream of red light narrows, till, quivering and palpitating, it rests as a bloody sword upon a colossal statue of black marble, facing westward. The statue is that of a woman, and is as of a Titan of old-time.

A great majesty is upon the face, with its moveless yet seeing eyes; its faint, inscrutable smile. Upon the triple-ledged pedestal, worn at the edges like unto swords ground again and again, lie masses of large white flowers, whose heavy fragrance rises in a faint blue vapor drawn forth with the sudden suspiration of the earth by the first twilight chill.

In the wide place beyond the white slab of stone—hurled thither, or raised, none knows when or how—is gathered a dark multitude, silent, expectant. Many are Arab tribesmen, the remnant of a strange sect driven southward; but most are Nubians, or that unnamed, swarthy race to whom

both Arab and Negro are as children. All, save the priests, of whom the elder are clad in white robes and the younger girt about by scarlet sashes, are naked. Behind the men, at a short distance apart, are the women; each virgin with an ivory circlet round the neck, each mother or pregnant woman with a thin gold band round the left arm. Between the long double line of the priests and the silent multitude stands a group of five youths and five maidens; each victim crowned with heavy, drooping, white flowers; each motionless, morose; all with eyes fixt on the trodden earth at their feet.

The younger priests suddenly strike together square brazen cymbals, deeply chased with signs and letters of a perished tongue. A shrill, screaming cry goes up from the people, followed by a prolonged silence. Not a man moves, not a woman sighs. Only a shiver contracts the skin of the foremost girl in the small central group. Then the elder priests advance slowly, chanting monotonously:]

CHORUS OF THE PRIESTS.

We are thy children, O mighty Mother!
We are the slain of thy spoil, O Slayer!
We are thy thoughts that are fulfilled, O Thinker!
Have pity upon us!

[And from all the multitude comes as with one shrill, screaming voice:]

Have pity upon us! Have pity upon us! Have pity upon us!

THE PRIESTS.

Thou wast, before the first child came through the dark gate of the womb!
Thou wast, before ever woman knew man!

Thou wast, before the shadow of man moved athwart the grass!
Thou wast, and thou art!

THE MULTITUDE.

Have pity upon us! Have pity upon us! Have pity upon us!

THE PRIESTS.

Hail, thou who art more fair than the dawn, more dark than night!
Hail, thou, white as ivory or veiled in shadow!
Hail, thou of many names, and immortal!
Hail, Mother of God, Sister of the Christ, Bride of the Prophet!

THE MULTITUDE.

Have pity upon us! Have pity upon us! Have pity upon us!

THE PRIESTS.

O moon of night, O morning star! Consoler! Slayer!
Thou, who lovest shadow, and fear, and sudden death!
Who art the smile that looks upon women and children!
Who hast the heart of man in thy grip as in a vice;
Who hast his pride and strength in thy sigh of yestereve;
Who hast his being in thy breath that goeth forth, and is not!

THE MULTITUDE.

Have pity upon us! Have pity upon us!
Have pity upon us!

THE PRIESTS.

We know thee not, nor the way of thee, O Queen!
But we bring thee what thou lovedst of old, and forever:
The white flowers of our forests and the red flowers of our bodies!
Take them and slay not, O Slayer!
For we are thy slaves, O Mother of Life!
We are the dust of thy tireless feet, O Mother of God!

[As the white-robed priests advance slowly towards the Black Madonna, the younger tear off their scarlet sashes, and, seizing the five maidens, bind them together, left arm to right and hand to hand: and then in like fashion do they bind the five youths. Thereafter the victims move silently forward, till they pass through the ranks of the priests and stand upon the lowest edge of the pedestal of the great statue. Toward each steps, and behind each stands, a naked priest, each holding a narrow, irregular sword of antique fashion.]

THE ELDER PRIESTS.

O Mother of God!

THE YOUNGER PRIESTS.

O Slayer, be pitiful!

THE VICTIMS.

O Mother of God! O Slayer! be merciful!

THE MULTITUDE.

[In a loud, screaming voice.] *Have pity upon us! Have pity upon us! Have pity upon us!*

[The last blood-red gleam fades from the Black Madonna, and flashes this way and that for a moment from the ten sword-knives that cut the air and plunge beneath the shoulders and to the heart of each victim. A wide spirt of blood rains upon the white flowers at the base of the colossal figure; where also speedily lie, dark amidst welling crimson, the motionless bodies of the slain.]

THE PRIESTS.

Behold, O Mother of God,
The white flowers of our forests and the red flowers of our bodies!
Have pity, O Compassionate!
Be merciful, O Queen!

THE MULTITUDE.

Have pity upon us! Have pity upon us! Have pity upon us!

[But at the swift coming of the darkness, the priests hastily cover the dead with the masses of the white flowers; and one by one, and group by group, the multitude melts away. When all are gone save the young chief Bihr, and a few of his following, the priests prostrate themselves

before the Black Madonna, and pray to her to vouchsafe a sign.

From the mouth of the carven figure comes a hollow voice, muffled as the reverberation of thunder among distant hills:]

THE BLACK MADONNA.

I hearken.

THE PRIESTS.

[*Prostrate.*] Wilt thou slay, O Slayer?

THE BLACK MADONNA.

Yea, verily.

THE PRIESTS.

[*In a rising chant.*] Wilt thou save, O Mother of God?

THE BLACK MADONNA.

I save.

THE PRIESTS.

Can one see thee and live?

THE BLACK MADONNA.

At the Gate of Death.

[Whereafter no sound comes from the statue, already dim in the darkness that has crept from the forest. The priests rise, and disappear in silent groups under the trees.

The thin crescent moon slowly wanes. A phosphorescent glow from orchids and parasitic growths shimmers intermittently in

the forest. A wavering beam of starlight falls upon the right breast of the Black Madonna; then slowly downward to her feet; then upon the motionless figure of Bihr, the warrior-chief. None saw him steal thither; none knows that he has braved the wrath of the Slayer: for it is the sacred time, when it is death to enter the glade.]

BIHR.

[*In a low voice.*] Speak, Spirit that dwelleth here from of old. . . . Speak, for I would have word with thee. I fear thee not, O Mother of God, for the priests of the Christ who is thy brother say that thou wert but a woman. . . . And it may be — it may be — what say the children of the Prophet? — that there is but one God, and he is Allah.

[Deep silence. From the desert beyond the forest comes the hollow roaring of lions.]

BIHR.

[*In a loud chant.*] To the north and to the east I have seen many figures like unto thine, gods and goddesses: some mightier than thou art — vast sphinxes by the flood of Nilus, gigantic faces rising out of the sands of the desert. And none spake, for silence is come upon them; and none slays, for the strength of the gods passes away even as the strength of men.

[Deep silence. From the obscure waste of the forest come snarling cries, long-drawn howls, and the low, moaning sigh of the wind.]

BIHR.

[*Mockingly.*] For I will not be thrall to a woman, and the priests shall not bend me to their will as a slave unto the yoke. If thou thyself art God, speak, and I shall be thy slave to do thy will. . . . Thrice have I come hither at the new moon, and thrice do I go hence uncomforted. . . . What voice was that which spoke ere the victims died? I know not; but it hath reached mine ears never save when the priests are by. Nay [*laughing low*], O Mother of God, I —

[Suddenly he trembles all over and falls on his knees, for from the blackness above him comes a voice:]

THE BLACK MADONNA.

What would'st thou?

BIHR.

[*Hoarsely.*] Have mercy upon me, O Queen!

THE BLACK MADONNA.

What would'st thou?

BIHR.

I worship thee, Mother of God! Slayer and Saver!

THE BLACK MADONNA.

What would'st thou?

BIHR.

[*Tremulously.*] Show me thyself, thyself, even for this one time, O Strength and Wisdom!

[Deep silence. The wind in the forest passes away with a faint wailing sound. The dull roaring of lions rises and falls in the distance. A soft, yellow light illumes the statue, as though another moon were rising behind the temple.

A great terror comes upon Bihr the Chief, and he falls prostrate at the base of the Black Madonna.

His eyes are open, but they see naught save the burnt spikes of trodden grass, sere and stiff save where damp with newly shed blood; and deaf are his ears, though he waits for he knows not what sound from above.

Suddenly he starts, and the sweat mats the hair on his forehead when he feels a touch on his right shoulder. Looking slowly round he sees a woman, tall and of a lithe and noble body. He sees that her skin is dark, yet not of the blackness of the South. Two spheres of wrought gold cover her breasts; and from the serpentine zone round her waist is looped a dusky veil, spangled with shining points. In her eyes, large as those of the desert-antelope, is the loveliness and the pathos and the pain of twilight.]

BIHR.

[*Trembling.*] Art thou — art thou —

THE BLACK MADONNA.

I am she whom thou worshippest.

BIHR.

[*Looking at the colossal statue, irradiated by the strange light that comes he knows not whence; and then at the beautiful apparition by his side.*] Thou art the Black Madonna, the Mother of God!

THE BLACK MADONNA.

Thou sayest it.

BIHR.

[*Slowly raising himself, and resting on one knee.*] Thou hast heard my prayer, O Queen!

THE BLACK MADONNA.

Even so.

BIHR.

[*Taking heart because of the sweet and thrilling humanity of the goddess.*] O Slayer and Saver, is the lightning thine and the fire that is in the earth? Canst thou whirl the stars as from a sling, and light the mountainous lands to the South with falling meteors? O Queen, destroy me not, for I am thy slave, and weaker than thy breath: but canst thou stretch forth thine hand and say yea to the lightning, and bid silence unto the thunder ere it breed the bolts that smite? For if —

THE BLACK MADONNA.

I make and I unmake. This cometh and that goeth, and I am —

BIHR.

And thou art —

THE BLACK MADONNA.

I was Ashtaroth of old. Men have called me many names. All things change, but I change not. Know me, O slave! I am the Mother of God. I am the Sister of the Christ. I am the Bride of the Prophet.

BIHR.

[*With awe.*] And thou art the very Prophet, and the very Christ, and the very God! Each speaketh in thee, who art older than they are: each —

THE BLACK MADONNA.

I *am* the Prophet.

BIHR.

Hail, O Lord of Deliverance!

THE BLACK MADONNA.

I *am* the Christ, the Son of God.

BIHR.

Hail, O most Patient, most Merciful!

THE BLACK MADONNA.

I *am* the Lord thy God.

BIHR.

Hail, Giver of Life and Death!

THE BLACK MADONNA.

Yet here none is; for each goeth or each cometh as I will. I only am eternal.

BIHR.

[*Crawling forward and kissing her feet.*] Behold, I am thy slave to do thy will: thy sword to slay: thy spear to follow: thy hound to track thine enemies. I am dust beneath thy feet. Do with me as thou wilt.

THE BLACK MADONNA.

[*Slowly, and looking at him strangely.*] Thou shalt be my High Priest. . . . Come back to-morrow, an hour after the setting of the sun.

[As Bihr the Chief rises and goes into the shadow, she stares steadily after him; and a deep fear dwells in the twilight of her eyes. Then, turning, she stands awhile by the slain bodies of the victims of the sacrifice; and, having lightly brushed away with her foot the flowers above each face, looks long on the mystery of death. And when at last she glides by the great statue and passes into the ruins beyond, there is no longer any glow of light, and a deep darkness covers the glade. From the deeper darkness beyond comes the howling of hyenas, the shrill screaming of a furious beast of prey, and the sudden bursting roar of lion answering lion.

When the dawn breaks, and a pale, wavering light glimmers athwart the smooth, white crag that, on the farther verge of the glade, faces the Black Madonna, there is nought upon the pedestal save a ruin of bloodied, trampled flowers, though the sere, yellow grass is stained in long trails across the

open. The dawn withdraws again, but ere long suddenly wells forth, and it is as though the light wind were bearing over the forest a multitude of soft, grey feathers from the breasts of doves. Then the dim concourse of feathers is as though innumerable leaves of wild roses were falling, falling, petal by petal uncurling into a rosy flame that wafts upward and onward. The stars have grown suddenly pale, and the fires of Phosphor burn green in the midst of a palpitating haze of pink. With a mighty rush, the sun swings through the gates of the East, tossing aside his golden, fiery mane as he fronts the new day.

And the going of the day is from morning silence unto noon silence, and from the silence of the afternoon unto the silence of the eve. Once more, towards the setting of the sun, the multitude comes out of the forest, from the east and from the west, and from the north and from the south: once more the priests sing the sacred hymns: once more the people supplicate as with one shrill, screaming voice, *Have pity upon us! Have pity upon us! Have pity upon us!* Once more the victims are slain: of little children who might one day shake the spear and slay, five; and of little children who would one day bear and bring forth, five.

Yet again an hour passes after the setting of the sun. There is no moon to lighten the darkness and the silence; but a soft glow falleth from the temple, and upon the man who kneels before the Black Madonna. But when Bihr, having no sign vouchsafed, and hearing no sound, and discerning nought upon the carven face, neither tremor of the lips nor life in the lifeless eyes, suddenly sees the goddess, glorious in her beauty that is as of the night, coming towards him from out of the ruins, his heart leaps within

him in strange joy and dread. Scarce knowing what he does, he springs to his feet, trembling as a reed that leans against the flank of a lioness by the water-pool.]

BIHR.

[*Yearningly, with supplicating arms.*] Hail, God! . . . Goddess! Most Beautiful!

[She draws nigh to him, looking at him the while out of the deep twilight of her eyes.]

THE BLACK MADONNA.

What would'st thou?

BIHR.

[*Wildly, stepping close, but halting in dread.*] Thou art no Mother of God, O Goddess, Queen, Most Beautiful!

THE BLACK MADONNA.

What would'st thou, O blind fool that art so in love with death?

BIHR.

[*Hoarsely.*] Make me like unto thyself, for I love thee!

[Deep silence. From afar on the desert comes the dull roaring of lions by the water-courses; from the forest, a murmurous sound as of baffled winds snared among the thick-branched ancient trees.]

BIHR.

[*Sobbing as one wounded in flight by an arrow.*] For I love thee! I — love — thee! I —

[Deep silence. A shrill screaming of a bird fascinated by a snake comes from the forest. Beyond, from the desert, a long, desolate moaning and howling, where the hyenas prowl.]

THE BLACK MADONNA.

When . . . did . . . thy folly, . . . this madness, . . . come upon thee, . . . O fool?

BIHR.

[*Passionately.*] O Most Beautiful! Most Beautiful! Thee — *Thee* — will I worship!

THE BLACK MADONNA.

Go hence, lest I slay thee!

BIHR.

Slay, O Slayer, for thou art Life and Death! . . . But I go not hence. I love thee! I love thee! I love thee!

THE BLACK MADONNA.

I am the Mother of God.

BIHR.

I love thee!

THE BLACK MADONNA.

God dwelleth in me. I am thy God.

BIHR.

I love thee!

THE BLACK MADONNA.

Go hence, lest I slay thee!

BIHR.

Thou tremblest, O Mother of God! Thy lips twitch, thy breasts heave, O thou who callest thyself God!

THE BLACK MADONNA.

[*Raising her right arm menacingly.*] Go hence, thou dog, lest thou look upon my face no more.

[Then suddenly, with bowed head and shaking limbs, Bihr the Chief turns and passes into the forest. And as he fades into the darkness, the Black Madonna stares a long while after him, and a deep fear broods in the twilight of her eyes. But by the bodies of the slain children she passes at last, and with a shudder looks not upon their faces, but strews the heavy white flowers more thickly upon them.

The darkness comes out of the darkness, billow welling forth from spent billow on the tides of night. On the obscure waste of the glade, nought moves save the gaunt shadow of a hyena that crawls from column to column. From the blackness beyond swells the long, thunderous howl of a lioness, echoing the hollow blasting roar of a lion standing, with eyes of yellow flame, on the summit of the mass of smooth rock that faces the carven Madonna.

And when the dawn breaks, and long lines of pearl-gray wavelets ripple in a flood athwart the black-green sweep of the forest, there is nought upon the pedestal but red flowers

that once were white, rent and scattered this way and that. The cool wind moving against the east ruffles the opaline flood into a flying foam of pink, wherefrom mists and vapors rise on wings like rosy flames; and as they rise, their crests shine as with blazing gold, and they fare forth after the Morn that leaps towards the Sun.

And the going of the day is from morning silence unto noon silence, and from the silence of the afternoon unto the silence of eve. Once more, towards the setting of the sun, the multitude comes out of the forest, from the east and from the west, and from the north and from the south. Once more the priests sing the sacred hymns: once more the people supplicate as with one shrill, screaming voice, *Have pity upon us! Have pity upon us! Have pity upon us!* Once more the victims are slain: five chiefs of captives taken in war; and unto each chief, two warriors in the glory of youth.

Yet an hour after the setting of the sun. Lightless the silence and the dark, save for the soft, yellow gleam that falleth from the temple, and upon the man who, crested with an ostrich plume bound by a heavy circlet of gold, with a tiger-skin about his shoulders, and with a great spear in his hand, stands beyond the statue and nigh unto the ruins, where no man has ventured and lived.]

BIHR.

[*With loud, triumphant voice.*] Come forth, my Bride!

[Deep silence, save for the sighing of the wind among the upper branches of the trees, and the panting of the flying deer beyond the glade.]

BIHR.

[*Striking his spear against the marble steps.*] Come forth, Glory of my eyes! Come forth, Pride of my delight!

[Deep silence. Then there is a faint sound, and the Black Madonna stands beside Bihr the Chief. And the man is wrought to madness by her beauty, and lusts after her, and possesses her with the passion of his eyes.]

THE BLACK MADONNA.

[*Trembling, and strangely troubled.*] What would'st thou?

BIHR.

Thee!

THE BLACK MADONNA.

[*Slowly.*] Young art thou, Bihr, in thy comeliness and strength to be so in love with death.

BIHR.

Who giveth life? and who death? It is not thou, nor I.

THE BLACK MADONNA.

[*Shuddering.*] It cometh. None can stay it.

BIHR.

Not thou? Even *thou* canst not stay it?

THE BLACK MADONNA.

[*Whisperingly.*] Nay, Bihr; and this thing thou knowest in thy heart.

BIHR.

[*Mockingly.*] O Mother of God! O Sister of Christ! O Bride of the Prophet!

THE BLACK MADONNA.

[*Putting her hand to her heart.*] What would'st thou!

BIHR.

Thee!

THE BLACK MADONNA.

I am the Slayer, the Terrible, the Black Madonna.

BIHR.

And lo, thy God laugheth at thee, even as at me and mine. And lo, I am come for thee; for I have made myself his Prophet, and thou art to be my Bride.

[As he finishes he turns towards the great Statue of the Black Madonna and, laughing, hurls his spear against its breast, whence the weapon rebounds with a loud clang. Then, ere the woman knows what he has done, he leaps to her and seizes her in his grasp, and kisses her upon the lips, and grips her with his hands till the veins sting in her arms. And all the sovereignty of her lonely godhood passes from her like the dew before the hot breath of the sun, and her heart throbs against his side so that his ears ring as with the clang of the gongs of battle. He sobs low, as a man amidst baffling waves; and in the hunger of his desire she sinks as one who drowns.

Together they go up the long, flat marble steps; together they pass into the darkness of the ruins. From the deeper darkness beyond comes no sound, for the forest is strangely still. Not a beast of prey comes nigh unto the slain victims of the sacrifice, not a vulture falls like a cloud through the night. Only, from afar, the dull roaring of the lions billows heavily from the water-courses on the desert.

And the wind that blows in the night comes with rain and storm, so that when the dawn breaks it is as a sea of sullen waves grey with sleet. But calm cometh out of the blood-red splendor of the east.

And on this, the morning of the fourth and last day of the Festival of the Black Madonna, the multitude of her worshippers come forth from the forest, singing a glad song. In front go the warriors, the young men brandishing spears, and with their knives in their left hands cutting the flesh upon their sides and upon their thighs: the men of the North clad in white garb and heavy burnous, the tribesmen of the South naked save for their loin-girths, but plumed as for war.

But as the priests defile beyond them upon the glade, a strange, new song goes up from the shaven lips; and the people tremble, for they know that some dire thing has happened.]

THE PRIESTS.

[Chanting.] *Lo, when the law of the Queen is fulfilled, she passeth from her people awhile. For the Mother of God loveth the world, and would go in sacrifice. So loveth us the Mother of God that she passeth in sacrifice. Behold, she perisheth, who dieth not! Behold, she dieth, who is immortal!*

[Whereupon a great awe comes on the multitude, as they behold smoke, whirling and darkly fulgurant, issuing from the mouth and nostrils of the Black Madonna. But this awe passes into horror, and horror into wild fear, when great tongues of flame shoot forth amidst the wreaths of smoke, and when from forth of the Black Madonna come strange and horrible cries, as though a mortal woman were perishing by the torture of fire.

With shrieks the women turn and fly: hurling their spears from them, the men dash wildly to the forest, heedless whither they flee.

But those that leap to the westward, where the great white rock facing the Black Madonna stands solitary, see for a moment, in the glare of sunrise, a swarthy, naked figure, with a tiger-skin about the shoulders, crucified against the smooth white slope. Down from the outspread hands of Bihr the Chief trickle two long wavering streamlets of blood: two long streamlets of blood drip, drip down the white, glaring face of the rock from the pierced feet.

The Last Quest.

Death hath not yet come unto the man who knoweth not that he is dead.

JOHANNES ARBITER: *Myst.*

The Last Quest.

[As in a vision . . . the furious charge through the smoke and across the corpse-strewn battlefield: the neighing and sobbing of horses; the hoarse cries, the sudden screams of men: the clang and whistle of swords: the shrill spurting of a hail of bullets: the bursting crash and roar of artillery: a wild rush, a wild onslaught, and — Victory! . . . and . . .

And as I clomb the barren and difficult steep, I yearned for a fellow-creature, for but the hollow echo of a distant voice, even more than for escape from the twilit solitudes of this hill whereup I toiled, forgetful whence I came and knowing not whither I went. And it seemed to me as though years upon years went over me in my long, ceaseless effort; but when, with a triumph that was yet no triumph, at last I gained the crest, I still heard in my ears the fanfare of the bugles, the clash of swords, the mad rush and fury and turmoil of the charge, while my lips quivered still with the sudden scream of *Victory*.

And when I stood upon the summit, I saw that I was in a strange land. Behind me lay a

vast plain, margined afar off, in the direction by which it seemed to me I had come, by obscure, impenetrable forests. Immeasurably upon this plain was ruin of ungarnered harvest. Leagues upon leagues to the east and west without end, and everywhere the grain ungathered; and nought astir save a thin dust of chaff, idly blown hither and thither by a wind that was yet too light to move the dark poppies that lay in the hollows, — too faint to bend an ear of that unlifted grain. Veiled moonlight shone upon the waste, so that even through the gloom I could see that nought moved, nought stirred: not even an owl swept with stealthy wing above the forlorn lands, not even a bat circled through the dusk, not even a cloud trailed a deeper shadow from solitude to solitude. But as I looked closer and wonderingly, and now with a great weariness of longing, I saw that every here and there the sheaves had been brought together as though the reapers had suddenly ceased from their labor and had gone to make ready for the harvesting. Yet, for the most part, the sheaves were but loosely gathered, and all untied, and with the ground near strewn with the rich grain that had, as it were, been abruptly dropped. And everywhere, far and wide, were single sheaves or small gatherings, as though the harvesters had been weary or heedless; and often sheaves that seemed as though they had been wittingly defiled or destroyed. But now all the ungarnered harvest lay silently there in the twilight; and no man

came unto that which was ready for the gathering, and no man passed by that which had been idly thrown aside or ruined in wantonness. And amidst it all, this vast harvest which stretched beyond sight to the uttermost ends of the earth, there was nothing further visible but the dark-red poppies of oblivion. Of all this immeasurable toil, of all this majesty of desolation, there was nought save a thin, vanishing dust of chaff, faint as a perishing smoke over woodlands where a fire has been, but is no more.

Then as one rousing from sleep into daylight, I turned and looked beyond me. Behold, here too was a vast plain that stretched beyond the scan of mortal eyes. The sunlight lay upon it, and it was glorious to look upon. A sweet wind came out of the blue hollows of the sky, where white clouds voyaged bearing soft rains and cool shadows: and there was so wild and glad a music of birds over the illimitable savannas of golden grain, and of young corn green as the heart of a shallow sea, that I felt as though all the joy of my youth was upon me, and my heart swelled, and the blood stung in my veins. But ere long I looked with amazement, for in all that unfrontiered land beyond me I saw neither man nor woman. Yet evermore, from the east to the west, swept a gigantic shadow like unto a scythe: and where the shadow swept, the grain fell. And when I looked again I beheld a mighty Shape, clothed in the dusk of shadow as with a veil, and clad

with dropping decays as with a tattered robe rent by the wind. Ever and forever the Reaper strode, with blind, oblivious eyes, with vast scythe furrowing the sunlit grain: and it seemed to me, while I watched, as though the minutes passed into hours, and the hours into days, and the days into years, and the years into the timeless wastes of eternity. Looking suddenly back upon the twilit land which first I had brooded upon, I saw that its margins were as the moving tides of ocean, and that the Reaper reaped where the grain grew by the fallen grain. And there was no rest, no end to the long sweep of the shadowy scythe. Ever, forever, the scythe swept: ever, forever, the grain fell. The sun shone, the birds sang, the world smiled; and, by the margins of the Hollow Land, where the grain rose the grain fell.

Then a terror that was of life overmastered the terror that was of death, and I strained my eyes so that I might see some living thing of my own kind. But only the rays of the sun penetrated the womb of the earth, and only the endless concourse of the grain was delivered of the unwearying mother. It seemed to me, then, as though the green corn and the golden ears were but as the multitude of lives that come forth at the rising of the sun, and are no more at the setting. And as I looked with awe and terror upon the Reaper, who reaped forever and ever where the grain rose and the grain fell, I turned and stared beyond the westering sun. And lo, I beheld yet Another. A glory

of golden light he seemed, clad with ever evanishing rainbows, and crowned with the auroral flames of summer dawns.

Vast was he as the Reaper; but as he fared beyond the pathway of the sun, he was as the glory and joy of eternal youth. He, too, swayed an arm, even as the mighty scythe-sweep of the Reaper, an arm of glowing light: and therewith I saw that he sowed a living seed forever and ever. As I watched the Sower in the blinding splendor of the sunlight, it seemed to me that he moved onward as he sowed; and it was with me as though the minutes were like unto hours, and the hours like unto days, and the days unto years, and the years unto the immeasurable wastes of eternity.

Then, with a great cry, I ran down the slopes of the steep whereon I was; for my heart was fain to follow the beautiful Sower, and my soul full of dread of the Reaper that reaped forever. But when I came unto the base of the hill, and to the end of the gloomy pass that issued thence, I went no further. For over against me rose a vast wall of black basalt, and upon it, in letters of white flame, were the words of my agony. And when I read TOO SOON, I turned me in my despair, and with bitterness of grief clomb again the perilous steep.

When once more I had gained the summit, I had no heart to look where the glory of the sun fell about the Sower, sowing his living seed forever and ever. But when I looked again

upon the Reaper — with mighty scythe laying low without end, without rest, where the grain rose and the grain fell — I cried aloud in my extremity of dread.

Thereafter, it seemed to me that in the Hollow Land behind me was peace. So passed I down the hill, and through the twilit waste of all that ungarnered harvest. And there was no sound there, and nought stirred, save the slow, thin fall of the dust among the hollows forever upon the dark-red poppies of oblivion.

And I know not how long I fared, or whither; but at last, weary — weary unto death of that harvest that should never be gathered — I came nigh unto the obscure forest I had seen from the hill-summit from afar. And I was glad, for I was weary of the Hollow Land.

But when I would enter the wood, I saw that the growths were intricately drawn against yet another wall of black basalt. And as I stood, pondering, I beheld two mighty portals, and betwixt them a huge mass of marble like unto the tomb. And in great letters carven thereon were the words: TOO LATE.

The Fallen God.

CHRISTIAN

. . . nay, but doth not God owe that which He hath promised?

PAGAN

He payeth in divers ways.

CHRISTIAN

Is not His glory my glory, for lo He dwelleth in me and I in Him?

PAGAN

Even so. Thus hath it ever been, O worshipper of thine own soul!

THE IDOLATER.

The Fallen God.

[A vast hollow among barren hills, whereon no living thing moves or has being, and where no flower blooms, no grass or any green thing grows ever. Above the sheer slopes of the hills reaches the immense empty void of the sky, wherein there is no sun and no moon, wherein no stars mark a change that never comes, no clouds wander before the shepherd-wind that blows never.

At the far rise of the hollow — so vast that echoes from the gorge issuing at the hither end wander idly into silence ere their whispers faint midway — is a gigantic fallen altar, ancient beyond the ken of man, and prostrate as it lay even in dim antiquity. Behind it stretches to the right and to the left, and reaches upward into the lifeless sky, a sheer smooth wall of basalt, polished as ice and black as the grave. And upon this ruined, ancient altar, as upon a throne, sits the Prophet: in his eyes a woe more terrible than the desolation of the sky overhead — a terror of loneliness more awful than that of the barren hills.

All the valley — from the base of the gigantic fallen altar even unto the hithermost end, whereby all may come but none may go — is filled with an innumerable throng, so dense that no man might pass through these close ranks. In all the valley and

upon all the hills nothing stirs, nothing moves.

In the forefront of this silent concourse stand the dead kings; and behind them, rows upon rows, the high priests of the people. Even as though in one motionless stare, all look upon the Prophet, the herald of their eternal joy. And in a low, hollow voice, that yet is heard of all, as though a rumor of earthquake and awful thunder were echoing from the desolate void, the Prophet speaks:]

THE PROPHET.

What would ye?

[As a sigh that goes before the autumnal wind, the dead kings speak: and the woe in the face of the Prophet passes understanding:]

THE KINGS.

We are even as the dust upon the highway. O Prophet, where is our God? We would look upon him face to face.

[Looking upon them, with eyes wherein the last hope flickers unto death, the Prophet answers:]

THE PROPHET.

There is no God.

[Terrible is the wail from the people, from one and from all throughout that dense throng; but silence comes upon them as a wave, as the priests stretch forth their arms and supplicate:]

THE PRIESTS.

Far have we fared, and bitter has been the way, O Prophet of God! Lead us now to the God whom we worship, lest we perish ere he gather us to his fold.

THE PROPHET.

What would ye, O blind leaders of the blind?

THE PRIESTS.

Our God! Our God!

THE PROPHET.

There is no God.

[Terrible is the wail from the people, from one and all throughout the dense concourse; but, as the priests stand moveless, like dumb things stricken unto the death, the multitude cries as with one voice, with arms stretched forth even as one arm:]

THE PEOPLE.

We have endured to the end! We are weary; we are weary: O God!

THE PROPHET.

What would ye?

THE PEOPLE.

Our God! Our God!

THE PROPHET.

There is no God.

[An awful whisper goes over the massed multitude:]

THE PEOPLE.

Have we suffered, endured, agonized, passioned, hoped against hope, and all in vain?

[And till the Prophet speaks, a yet more awful whisper passes like a shudder over the multitude:]

THE PROPHET.

There is no God!

[Then with one wild, despairing cry, all supplicate as one man:]

THE PEOPLE.

Have we wrought in vain?

THE PROPHET.

Yea, so.

THE PEOPLE.

And is there no God?

PROPHET.

There is no God.

[As a howl of a wild beast is the voice of the multitude:]

THE PEOPLE.

Liar, liar! O false Prophet, was it ever so? Did we worship nought?

[Then, with a long sigh, as if death had come indeed, the Prophet answers:]

THE PROPHET.

Nay, your God was.

THE PEOPLE.

Where is he? Let us come unto him! Our God! Our God!

THE PROPHET.

Behold, he is here.

THE PEOPLE.

Where? Where?

[And lo, prostrate at the feet of the dead Prophet, whose eyes become as stone, and whose body as the unhewn marble in the heart of the hills, is the fallen God.

Then, as the last wave of a perishing sea, all the multitude moves onward. One by one each of that mighty company passes before the fallen altar and looks upon the dead God. And to each — kings and priests, elders and youths, women and maidens, the frail and little children — it seems as though his own self lies there, staring upward out of his own eyes.

But, at the last, none is left of all these countless thousands. Each passes, and fades as a mist against the black wall beyond.

And a great darkness comes down, though decrescent along the forefront is a dying orb, the faint, vanishing gleam whereof falls upon the stony wilderness, void as the void sky. No voice speaks; no breath moves — save only at the base of the fallen altar a perishing eddy of wind that stirs a handful of dust.]

The Coming of the Prince.

"Amour ! O vie ! O rêve des rêves."

The Coming of the Prince.

[A great forest, at midwinter, in the North of France. The snow lies heavy on the boughs of the oaks and beeches, and upon the pendulous branches of the larches and firs. The afternoon sky is of a pale turquoise blue, faintly dulled toward the north into a vaporous grey.

In the depth of the wood, a charcoal-burner is stooping over a pile of fagots which he is binding. Suddenly he raises his head and listens intently. Far off, there is a faint strain of music. It mounts and wavers and passes away, as a feather blown from a bird in its flight sways this way and that and then drifts out of sight. The charcoal-burner resumes his labor; but, later, he once more suddenly raises his head and sniffs the chill woodland air.]

THE CHARCOAL-BURNER.

It is strange. Midwinter . . . and there is a smell as of violets . . . faint . . . like those white violets in summer in the garden of the curé . . . or (*still sniffing the air perplexedly*) like those in the woods of Belamor. . . . Well, well, I know not. I have seen and heard many

things. . . . Ay, and so the Sieur de Fontnoir is to have a great prince for his guest, they say. I would he might pass this way, for I am poor — ah, so poor, and it is bitter cold — and perhaps . . . [*again he listens intently, as a faint sound of music floats through the air and lingeringly dies*] . . . It is strange!

[He gathers a few stray fagots, and then, heavily and wearily, follows a path that leads through the forest. A thin snow begins to fall: large fringed feathers swirl softly this way and that, dusking the upper air, and drawing a veil of fugitive whiteness over the tangled undergrowth. Silently, as the visionary thoughts that drift through dreams, the snowflakes fall, till the upper boughs of the firs are as vast white plumes, and a dense carpet is so thickly woven over the glades that the hare does not leap from under the frozen bracken, and under the arched roots of the old oak the yellow eyes of the fox blink drowsily.

At the northern march of the forest there is a great avenue that leads to the Château of Fontnoir; and at the far end of this, and close to the manor, Gaspard the Huntsman walks, stamping as he goes, so as to shake the snow from him. As he passes the many-gabled west wing of Fontnoir, he is hailed from an open window by Raoul, an old servitor.]

RAOUL.

Gaspard! Gaspard! have you seen or heard aught of the Prince?

GASPARD.

What Prince?

RAOUL.

Why, the Prince whom both our Lord and the Lady Alaine have been expecting. I know no more. He may come unannounced and when unexpected, so says Father Fabien.

GASPARD.

I have been in the forest all day. I met no one.

RAOUL.

You saw no one! You heard nothing?

GASPARD.

I saw no one except old Pierre the charcoal-burner. I heard nothing unusual — except — except —

RAOUL.

Except what?

GASPARD.

Within the last hour I heard twice a faint sound as of music.

RAOUL.

Music?

GASPARD.

Yes; I think Sylvain, from St. Luc du Lys, must be wandering hither again. I hope so: that lute of his has magic in it, and he has a voice as sweet as the spring wind.

RAOUL.

I care not for your lute-players and singers. You are as bad as Sylvain, Gaspard. . . . Is it going to be a snowstorm?

GASPARD.

No. This fall will soon cease. The night will be clear.

[Raoul closes the window, and Gaspard passes on and disappears into the east wing. A great silence prevails. The snowflakes fall softly, but grow thinner and more thin, and at last only a few wandering feathers drift hither and thither.

At an oriel window stand Marcel and Alaine. The room beyond is in deep shadow. To the left, a door opens on a corridor: to the right another, leading to a stone staircase that descends abruptly. The first is closed; the second is ajar. The waning afternoon light falls upon Alaine's face as the dim glow of the crescent moon on water lilies. She is very beautiful, but pale as death. Marcel is clad as though for a journey. He, too, is pale; but in his dark eyes there is a fierce flame of life.]

ALAINE.

If my father knew that you were here, Marcel —

MARCEL.

Let him know. I care not.

ALAINE.

He hates you and your house.

MARCEL.

He is an old man, who has lived with Shadows.

ALAINE.

Father Fabien —

MARCEL.

Alaine, what flowers have you there? It is midwinter — and yet I seem to smell the fragrance of violets.

ALAINE.

There will be no violets for months yet. There are no flowers here.

MARCEL.

Yes . . . violets; . . . those faint, white violets you love so well.

[The last rays of the sun stream through the upper boughs of the forest, and all the whiteness is as autumnal moonlight. The gleam illumes the face of Alaine, which is transformed to a beauty as of a summer sea. She laughs low, and in a sweet, hushed voice sings:]

White dreams,
White thoughts,
White hopes!
Shy violets.
White violets.
In woodland ways, by the brook-side,
on the hill-slopes!

Strange joy,
New thrills,
Vague fears:
Violets,
White violets,
White kisses from the lips of Spring,
white dewy tears.

White hands,
O lead me where
The white Spring strays
'Mid violets,
White violets,
On the hill-slopes, by the brook-side,
in woodland ways.

[A silence. The last glow of the sun passes. A yellow light illumes the wood.]

MARCEL.

Why do you sing that song?

ALAINE.

[*Dreamily.*] Because they are the flowers, the best-beloved flowers, of the Prince. . . .

[*softly*]

In woodland ways, by the brook-side, on the hill-slopes!

MARCEL.

Alaine!

ALAINE.

Hush! Some one comes. If it should be my father — or — or — Father Fabien!

MARCEL.

It cannot be your father: he is too ill to move. It is Raoul: I know his heavy step.

[Raoul knocks and opens the door. He glances, startled for a moment, at Marcel; then bows. Then, looking towards Alaine:]

RAOUL.

Did you wish me?

ALAINE.

No. Why do you come?

RAOUL.

I heard a sound as of that little silver chime of bells that Sylvain the minstrel brought you last Noël. It was in the corridor.

ALAINE.

Impossible. You are dreaming, Raoul.

RAOUL.

[*To Marcel.*] Monseigneur de St. Michel, you face the great doorway of Fontnoir. Did you see any one approach? Have you stood here long?

MARCEL.

No one has approached since the sun dipped among the firs.

RAOUL.

It is strange. A loud peal at the door happened just as I was crossing the west gallery. I answered the summons at once; but, see you, my Lord Marcel, when I went to the door it was open, and no one was there.

MARCEL.

Some one must have opened it.

RAOUL.

No one could have done so unseen by me. It was not open before the summons.

MARCEL.

Some one must have rung, and then abruptly gone elsewhere.

RAOUL.

I looked out upon the court. There was not the faintest impress of a footstep upon the white sheet of the snow.

MARCEL.

Well, it has been an illusion, Raoul.

[He crosses to the old servitor, whispers some directions in his ear, and then, as Raoul leaves the room, closes the door behind him. The yellow light over the snow-clad

woods grows more wan. Beyond are broad spaces of amber, and then a vast receding vault of dusky grey, wherein three pale stars gleam icily: on the snow in the foreground rests a furtive green light.]

ALAINE.

[*Dreamily.*] Ah, the sweet violets.

MARCEL.

You, too, smell the violets?

ALAINE.

[*Still as in a dream.*] And, said Sylvain the poet, when the Prince had made a wreath of white violets, gathered in the sunshine, but each with the moonshine dew still cool within it, he crowned himself therewith, and —

MARCEL.

Who is this Prince who is coming? Why is he likely to come alone and disguised?

ALAINE.

I know not.

MARCEL.

Alaine, oh, my darling! I love you! Alaine! Alaine!

ALAINE.

Marcel!

[Marcel sinks on his knees by her side, and wildly kisses her hand.]

MARCEL.

Have pity upon me, have pity, Alaine!

ALAINE.

Rise, Marcel.

MARCEL.

Alaine! Alaine!

ALAINE.

Rise, heart of my heart, my darling, my darling!

MARCEL.

[*Springing to his feet, and holding her at arm's length.*] O my beautiful Alaine — my joy — my dream! Do you indeed love me even as I love you? No — no — that cannot be, for I worship you! O my darling, my darling!

ALAINE.

I have loved you always, Marcel. But you know my father's vow — my father's hatred: he would kill you rather than —

MARCEL.

And now — and now?

ALAINE.

I love you, and you only, Marcel. Do with me as you will. I am a lost wave without you — a lost wave on a great sea, dark and shoreless.

MARCEL.

Then farewell all this long, troubled dream!

ALAINE.

Farewell this dream that is dreamt — this weary dream!

MARCEL.

And you will come.

ALAINE.

I come.

[He takes her in his arms and kisses her passionately. Then, silent and soundlessly, they pass hand in hand from the room by the eastward door, and descend the narrow stairway.

And as they go, the room is full, as it were, with the odor of white violets. And ere they have reached the end of the winding stairway, they stop a moment, intently listening to a faint, sweet music as of lutes, that seems to come from the room they have left.]

ALAINE.

Ah, the sweet music!

MARCEL.

I have heard it in my dreams.

ALAINE.

. . . And I.

MARCEL.

It was ever with thee, Alaine!

ALAINE.

. . . And thee !

[They pass along the low stone corridor, and out behind the east wing, and into the court where Marcel's sleigh awaits them. As they sweep across the snow and into the forest, the green light passes into yellow, and the yellow deepens into orange. And, a little later, sitting by the fire in his hut, the charcoal-burner lifts his head and smiles slowly; for he thinks he hears Sylvain the minstrel, on his way to the Château to make music for the Prince.]

The Passing of Lilith.

"Connais-tu la Puissance ténébreuse qui trame nos destinées? . . . Des vies antérieures sont innombrablement présentes en moi; et je suis oppressé de mes pensées futures: je sais l'éternité. Ne suis-je l'irrévocable?"

The Passing of Lilith.

[The primal Eden, where the great rivers from the East and the West converge; where the winds bear abroad the rumor of the music of the young world, strange and passing sweet; where there is neither strife nor fear; where Lilith, the beautiful, soulless loveliness, reigneth supreme.

And in the serene day come ever and again the fairest of the Sons of God and do homage to her; but only to Uluel doth she yield herself. And in the serene night cometh the Spirit of this World, ofttimes in the guise of a beautiful Snake, and unto him Lilith is as flame to flame.]

THE VOICE OF THE SPIRIT OF THIS WORLD.

From afar I sigh for thee, O Beauty of the World!

LILITH.

[*Slowly moving through the Garden of Eden, where the dusk falleth.*] I would be alone this night.

THE VOICE.

[*As the passing of the wind.*] Thy thought is my thought, and thy will is my will.

[Through the dim groves and shadowy avenues of Paradise Lilith goeth slowly, as in a dream. She seeth not, she heedeth not, the beautiful denizens of Eden: the white doe that moveth beside her awhile, like moonlight; the yellow panther, whose eyes are as emerald flames in the dusk; the green-gold cobra, languidly undulating from bough to bough; the filmy, oft-evanishing creatures of the middle air, strange and lovely shapes, opal-eyed, faintly rainbow-hued; and wandering Spirits, passing fair, flowers of the unborn fruit of the Human Soul.

And after awhile she passeth, still as in a dream, by the margins of the great, unsailed waste of waters that stretcheth westward from Paradise, vaguely hearkening, as she goeth, the prophetic murmurs of the deep.

But the sound of the waters persuadeth her to a subtle sorrow, and she wandereth inland till she cometh to the great central fountain which riseth from the womb of the earth. And looking into the heart of it, Lilith is strangely troubled.]

LILITH.

[*Slowly, and still as in a dream.*] Lo, in the falling spray it seemeth that something shadowy like unto myself taketh form. Behold, now it towereth triumphantly. . . . Now it is a menacing suppliant, writhing with strange agonies. . . . Now it standeth passive, in sinister silence! And now it goeth — it passeth — is no more. Yet, see, in the heart of the spray it cometh again!

[Then, as though aweary of the vision, Lilith turneth away, and, going through the colonnades of the forest, cometh to the great

hill that is in the midst of Eden. And having gained the summit of the hill, she looketh long toward the North and toward the East, where the volcanic mountains are as a girdle of flame and falling ashes.

And a strange trouble cometh upon her, and she averteth her gaze, and descendeth the great hill that is in the midst of Eden, and passeth again into the forest; though she goeth not by the fountain, but by the starlit ways where the night-flowers exhale exquisite odors that are as dreams.]

THE VOICE OF THE SPIRIT OF THIS WORLD.

From afar I sigh for thee, O Beauty of the World!

LILITH.

[*Moving her lips.*] I would be alone this night.

THE VOICE.

[*As the passing of the wind.*] Even as thy thought is my thought, so is thy will my will.

[As the coming of moonlight through the dusk is the voice — as from afar off — of Uluel, the fairest of the Sons of God. . . .]

THE VOICE OF ULUEL.

Thou art as white fire in my heart, O Beauty of the World!

LILITH.

[*Alow and at rest, upon a slope of white violets, lying as surf round the cavernous bases of vast trees.*] For I am with thee as a Dream! But come not, for I —

[A wind ariseth, and passeth.]

THE VOICE OF ULUEL.

But lo! the time is at hand when —

[A wind cometh and goeth, and the voice is borne away. And there is utter silence in Eden. And Lilith sleepeth.

Hour by hour the dark blue veil of night is withdrawn, and star after star is left pale and evanescent. And when none is left to front the rose-light of the new day, save the white fire of Phosphor, that is the lamp of morning; and when a rapturous glow hath bourgeoned like a flower over the Garden of Eden; and when a Breath of Joy gladdeneth the world; Lilith awaketh. Then having listened awhile to the song of life, and drunken of the dew that lies in the chalices of the white flowers, and eaten of the golden manna that awaiteth her where she will, she smileth, and with a wild, sweet song, passeth like a dream of sunlight through the glades of Eden. And ever as she goeth, shadowy and beautiful forms like unto the souls of men follow after her: and as she passeth beneath the trees, she ofttimes plucketh the fruit thereof, and, kissing it, giveth of the fruit now unto this one and now unto that.]

LILITH.

[*Standing still, and as though listening intently.*] And if it so be—

FAINT VOICES FROM THE BEAUTIFUL SHADOWY FORMS.

Give us of the fruit! Give us of the fruit!

LILITH.

[*Throwing away the last fruit she pluckt.*] In the youth of the world I dreamt —

FAINT VOICES.

Give us of the fruit! Give us of the fruit!

LILITH.

[*Sombrely.*] And the Voice that I have heard thrice, and know not —

FAINT VOICES.

Give us of the fruit! Give us of the fruit! Oh, give us of the fruit.

LILITH.

[*Looking upon one of the Shadow-souls.*] What would'st thou?

THE SHADOW-SOUL.

The fruit!

LILITH.

Thou art a dream that is undreamt.

THE SHADOW-SOUL.

The fruit — oh, give us of the fruit.

[Slowly Lilith plucketh a fruit from off the tree, and, kissing it, giveth it to the suppliant.]

THE SHADOW-SOUL.

Ah, joy! joy! I am the Breath of Life! Immortal Life — Immortal Joy!

[As the Shadow-Soul eateth of the fruit, it becometh like a rosy phantom, with eyes as if filled with sunshine, and with a face like unto a sunlit sea.]

THE SHADOW-SOUL.

[*Moving apart from its fellows.*] Farewell! Farewell! For I am: and ye are as dreams that are undreamed.

[And as he goeth, the wild birds of Eden hover above him, and under his feet red and white flowers spring, and a low music followeth his steps.]

LILITH.

[*As in a dream.*] Farewell! Farewell! For I am: and ye are as dreams that are undreamed.

[But after the Shadow-Soul hath eaten of the fruit, the low music changeth into a mournful sighing, and the birds become like unto bats, and small, writhing snakes move where erst were the red and white flowers. Then the rosy phantom fadeth into greyness, and is no more. And nought of the Shadow-Soul remaineth, save one drop of blood which is like unto a bleeding heart, but speedily sinketh into the ground. And Lilith knoweth that before she pass that way again it will be a plant, and thereafter a tree, whereon will grow the mystic fruit wherewith unto these her worshippers she giveth life and death.]

LILITH.

[*Slowly reiterating.*] Farewell! Farewell! For I am: and ye are as dreams that are undreamed.

[Slowly Lilith, passing from the trees of the fruit, with a wave of her hand dismisseth all those that follow her with the hunger that is more than bodily hunger, and the thirst that is more than bodily thirst.

Like a dream of the sunlight, she goeth through the aisles of the forest. The glory of the morning falling upon her maketh her long hair as beaten gold — as pale gold that is aflame with an inner consuming fire. Her white body is as the ivory-white lily that groweth in solitary beauty in the heart of Eden: and the going of her is as the wave that moveth before the wind upon the deep: and the light that is in her eyes of fathomless blue is as that of the azure heaven an hour before the setting of the sun.

And as she goeth, she seeth down the vast vista of Eden the beautiful Uluel, the fairest of the Sons of God. With him are three others, each lovely as daybreak. But Uluel is as the splendor of day. And as they come nearer, the three vanish into the golden glow, and Uluel is alone. Then as a moving river of light he draweth near unto Lilith, and she seeth that the glory of his loveliness passeth knowledge. Hand in hand, they go forth together; and the innermost flower of flowers rejoiceth, and each blade of grass bendeth as with a wind. And throughout Eden there is a sound as of the laughter of life.

And while the moon prevaileth, Uluel, the fairest of the Sons of God, and Lilith lie among the lilies of the valley, where the spray of the fountain cools the air, and the shadows are deep from the great boughs of ancient trees. The joy that is their joy passeth knowledge, for Mortality is swallowed up in Immortality, as the stars that perish lie in the heart of the firmament. And Uluel, the Son of God, trembleth because of the unspeakable sin, and anon trembleth with the greatness of unspeakable joy. And Lilith dreameth.

When the day waneth in its glory, and the night, clothed with magnificence, is at hand, Uluel riseth.]

ULUEL.

Lilith, Heart of Beauty, wilt thou come?

LILITH.

I perish yonder.

ULUEL.

Thou canst not die. Thou art immortal.

LILITH.

I dreamed that I should die daily, and a thousand deaths.

ULUEL.

Love scorneth fear.

LILITH.

Fear warneth love.

ULUEL.

Come!

LILITH.

Show me the portals of thy golden house.

ULUEL.

[*Troubled.*] What would'st thou?

LILITH.

Thee!

ULUEL.

I must go hence. Already —

[A wind riseth, and passeth; and Lilith, lying upon the lilies alone, dreameth hour after hour. Slowly the day goeth through the gold and purple gates of the West: and the eve, with a crown of stars, cometh through the violet shadows. Through velvety glooms of darkness the night falleth, and the later splendor of the moon doth not dim the glory of the stars.]

THE VOICE OF THE SPIRIT OF THIS WORLD.

From afar I sigh for thee, O Beauty of the World!

LILITH.

[*With outstretched arms.*] Come unto me, O Flame of Love!

[Out of the dusk cometh a great Snake, of a beauty beyond words, and girt with a splendor like unto the wavelets of the sea when the moonlight lies upon the deep.

As he moveth, there is a sound as of a multitude of sweet lutes; as he breatheth, there is an echo of a myriad delicate strains. His voice is as the voice of the woods at sunrise, of the pastures when the day is done, of the West wind in valleys near the sea, of the rain after long drought. And Lilith giveth a low cry, and he passeth unto her.

And far away beyond the abysmal disc of the sun, Uluel singeth before God: and knoweth not that he is blind, and that God seeth, and waiteth.]

LILITH.

[*Whispering to the beautiful Snake coiled about her, as the ivy is at one with the tree it claspeth.*] Yet if dreams —

THE SPIRIT OF THIS WORLD.

Thou thyself art the Dream of the World.

[The moonlight spreadeth as a flood, and the great beasts of Eden meet and rejoice with one another.

And Lilith and the Spirit of the World are at one, as two rivers that flow into one sea. The mystery and the wonder and the secret ecstasy of night enter into them, and they know the unspeakable fear and the unspeakable joy.

But toward the noon of night a strange, wild chant, surpassing sweet, draweth near. Then, with a low sigh, the Snake uncoileth from the body of Lilith and passeth into the darkness, like unto the going of a moonlit river. Awhile doth Lilith list to the roaring of the wild beasts of Eden, and rejoice in their joy: but as the strange singing cometh nearer she riseth in her place, and waiteth as one who watcheth for her beloved.

Erelong issueth out of the green gloom a white company of beautiful beings, lovelier than aught else in Eden. Yet none knoweth their song save Lilith, for of all that pass by she is the mother.

And some are the offspring of her commerce with Uluel, the fairest of the Sons of God: and some are born of her dalliance with the beautiful Earth-Spirit, that is the Snake.

One by one she calleth unto them: unto the children of Uluel — Hopes, Aspirations, Fair Beliefs, Virtues, Glories, Joys, and Raptures: and unto the children of the Earth-Spirit, equally fair to look upon — Desires, Lusts, Agonies, Passions, Temptations, Sins, Shames, Sorrows, and Despairs.

But they, her offspring, will not abide; singing their mystic chant, one and all pass by. And when the white procession is no more, Lilith sinketh again upon the ground, and,

sleeping, dreameth a dream. And in her dream she seeth how all these offspring of her joys journey unto a strange goal: and how the children of the Snake, who are as males, terribly woo the children of the Son of God, who are as beautiful female spirits.

But, in the midst of her dream, she awaketh trembling, for a Voice prevaileth through the Gates of Death and Sleep.

THE VOICE.

Arise, thou that art Lilith!

LILITH.

[*Trembling.*] It is He!

THE VOICE.

Arise, Lilith, Spirit of the Flesh, and go up upon the mountain.

[Thereat Lilith, rising from her place, passeth through the wood to the great hill that is in the midst of Eden. And in her heart there is the weight of the old-world dreams. As she climbeth the great hill by the light of the flaming volcanoes, her face is pale as the light on a moonless sea. And when she looketh forth from the summit upon the girdle of mountains, belching forever their spume of red flames and clouds of molten ashes, her heart faileth her for terror. For all the heavens — from the verge of the world to the farthest of the stars — are alive with thin spectral flames: the vital essences, as Lilith knoweth, of those innumerable worshippers of hers who through past ages have eaten of her mystic fruit. Moreover, each supplicateth wildly to the unknown God. . . .]

Give us life, that we triumph over this beautiful Evil, which hath no soul, but who is yet immortal!

[And, much troubled, Lilith descendeth the great hill that is in the midst of Eden. And at the fountain which welleth from the womb of the earth, and at the phantasm of herself in the spray thereof, she looketh long and broodingly. Thereafter, with lips muttering, but without words, and with downcast eyes, she passeth onward toward the margin of the great sea that covereth all the world to the West.

There until the dawn lieth she, silent, motionless, as one dead. And at the outburst of the glory of the rising sun, there cometh a terrible voice out of the hollow heaven:]

THE VOICE.

Behold, man shall be born upon the earth. He shall inherit it. Unto the children of man is delivered thine inheritance. Hence pass thou, Lilith, even unto the great sea — thou and thine.

LILITH.

[*Slowly rising.*] Even so. For my time is come upon me.

[Then knowing that her time is come upon her, and that all things must be fulfilled, she goeth forward, silent, and trembling not, but with downcast eyes, and lieth by the uttermost margin of the great sea. All day long she abideth there; nor weepeth, nor maketh any wail of sorrow; but lieth ever with her breast against the sand, and with fixed eyes staring upon the sea.

And none cometh nigh her: neither Uluel, the fairest of the Sons of God; nor the fair

Snake, which is the Spirit of this World; nor any of her beautiful offspring; nor any of her shadow-worshippers, that are as the grains of sand in number; nor any fond beast or sheltering bird.

And at the noon of day, Lilith crieth aloud once:]

Uluel!

[And at the waning of the day, Lilith cries aloud yet again:]

Uluel!

[Slowly the fan-flame of the sun waneth above the great sea, and there is deep peace in Eden.

But ere the passing of the sun, and when all the ocean is red as with blood, the company of the offspring of Lilith by the Son of God and by the Spirit of the Earth come unto her out of Eden: Hopes and Despairs, Virtues and Sins, Glories and Shames, Raptures and Agonies, one and all come they unto her, their mother.]

THE CHILDREN OF LILITH.

[*Slowly chanting.*] We are immortal, and we cannot die!

[There is no following sound, no answer, but the moaning of the sea.]

THE CHILDREN OF LILITH.

[*With alien voices, passing away.*] We are immortal, and we cannot die!

[But Lilith, who hath stirred not for all their advent, only smileth constrainedly, and turneth not her staring eyes from off the deep. And the faint voices of the children of Lilith are lost in the moaning voice of the waters.]

LILITH.

Beautiful Spirit, I am thine.

[But only the night cometh. And the sea moveth as though quickened into life, and advanceth upon the land. When the moon riseth, there is nought upon the shore save a little frothing foam. In the silence of the night strange cries vibrate, and shadows innumerable pass to and fro, in the valleys of Eden.

And at sunrise God breatheth upon the dust, and Adam is.]

(1886 and 1893.)

The Lute-Player.

Les fibres de son cœur font les cordes d'un luth
Qui rhythme les accords des splendeurs éternelles. . . .

ISRAFEL.

The Lute-Player.

[In a long, high-vaulted room, looking out upon a Roman garden where the cypresses rise in narrowing shafts from thickets of oleander and myrtle, is seated a company of men and women, feasting. Touched with the coolness of the eve that has scarce come . . . though the last floating cloudlets of crimson and pink, like petals fallen from a late-gathered rose, still linger beyond the garden-fringe of ilex and pine . . . the soft, warm air of early summer steals into the room, laden with subtle odors, and reverberant as a hollow shell with vague sounds — the hum of the bees in the mignonette, of the gnats upon the wing, of the dragon-flies as they dart to and fro above the sunken fish-ponds.

At the head of the table, facing the open window, sits a Cardinal; beyond him on either side are men and women, for the most part young. The dancing-girls have just gone, and a sudden hush has come out of the twilight upon all assembled. A few look before them pensively, or idle with the rose leaves in the water in the crystal globes beside them; but most look towards the garden, where the shadows are fantastically long or merged in a violet gloom.

The light in the west has become gold and purple, with a wide stretch of pale, translucent green, against which the cypresses stand black and moveless: over all the sky is one vast wave of daffodil. Out of the heart of a myrtle-thicket comes the song of a nightingale, so thrilling with exultant passion that no one dares speak or move lest the charm be no more.

When, abruptly, the song ceases, there is still silence throughout the room. But suddenly a low, penetrating strain of music floats in upon the evening air, so poignant and yet so delicate, so rare and yet with touches of such sweet familiarity, that tears come into the eyes of many. Yet none knoweth who the musician is: and if some think that the subtle playing comes from the garden, others believe that the Cardinal has secreted a lute-player somewhere in the room, or behind the tapestries or waving curtains. And to some comes a sudden sense of peace, to others a quick joy. But one youth, turning to the fair woman beside him, is startled to see that her eyes look towards him as through a veil, and that her beauty shines upon him afar off, as in a pool the fugitive light briefly lingers while the moon rests on the mountain shoulder. With a strange dread at his heart he is about to lean forward, when he shrinks in terror, for between him and her yawns a black and bottomless gulf.

As a ripple of laughter and the sound of the wind among the grasses, goes the eager applause

of those sitting at the feast; and, low and clear above all, the voice of the Cardinal, bidding the musician enter and be one of his company. But the youth shudders, for now he hears, as it were, the echo of the music floating up from the hollow blackness of the gulf. Then, with a fear such as he has never known before, he rises, and reaches forward to gather to his arms the woman whom he loves; but, even while he still hears the blithe voices of the guests, he knows that he is sinking like a falling feather into the gulf. From far beneath he hears the strange music of the Lute-player: far above, the faint echo of it among the revellers, of whom he was one but a moment ago. As a swimmer sinks down into a fathomless sea, so sinks he: and in the waning gleam overhead, as of vanishing moonlight, he sees the pale, mourning face of her whom he loves.

With a light laugh, the Cardinal calls: —

"Ah! there goes the Lute-player: I saw his shadow fall upon the floor near the window."

And a guest cries: —

"And the nightingale has heard him too!"

Whereat there is again a profound stillness; for all sit entranced by the song of the unseen bird, which is now sad beyond words, and as though the little heart were breaking. The silence following is full of the afterthought of sweet music, as a calm sea is full of the moonlight long after a cloud-film veils the hollow sky. But suddenly, from the dusky avenues at the

far end of the garden, the vanishing lilt of a lute falls upon the ears of all. So sweet and blithe its music, that each smiles as with sudden gladness and relief: none knowing what silence has suddenly come unto one of them, what horror of deep darkness, what engulfing despair.

[And the Lute-player, passing unseen down the dark ways, fares toward the city: where the noise of falling waters is sweet to tired ears, and the hot air cooled with blown spray.]

As he silently goes on his way, none knows of his presence. But as he passes by a house in an obscure street, he hears a long, wailing cry: whereat he stands still, and listens intently ere, unseen, he enters and goes towards a room where, by the bed of a child, a mother kneels, sobbing and crying to God. In the shadow, unseen and unheard, he looks long at the woman and at the child. Then, slowly and softly, he begins to play; and the room is full of the delicate music of his lute, and upon the face of the child is an exceeding joy. And the child, with thin arms suddenly outstretched, cries eagerly: —

"Mother! mother! I see a beautiful stream, all gold in the sunshine; and beyond it is a meadow full of flowers; and everywhere, everywhere, oh, the sweet songs! Oh, mother! mother! the music, the sweet music!"

And the mother pitifully cries out: —

"Yes, yes, my little one: it is but a lute-player in the street."

But as she would reach to her child, she hearkens as it were the lute-music, floating far away above a mad rush and surge of waters: and among the screams of drowning wretches she hears a cry that goes to her heart, and at the same moment sees her child whirled on high and hurled through the swirling foam into the darkness beyond. Then, with a wild cry, she falls forward unconscious.

[In the stillness and in the shadow, the Lute-player goes forth into the street. And passing hence into a lonely and evil quarter, he plays upon his lute, but so softly that none hears him. It is as though the blossoms on the fruit-trees were whispering to the leaves, as though the moonbeams were dancing with the ripples on a stream, as though the wandering white rays of the stars were tangled in the long grasses and made a sweet, bewildering music.

Thereafter, passing by foul places and dens of loathsome evil, the low, haunting strain wanders, wanders, drifting this way and that, as though innumerable winged spirits were floating earthward with the falling dew, singing their thin aerial song, surpassing sweet. Some hear it for a moment, fleetingly faint, behind a curtain, or in a dark passage, or betwixt the sudden opening and closing of a door. Sometimes it is a vanishing echo, sweet and joyous as of the dawn-wind stirring among the upper branches of the forest, as the rippling wash of the sea when the sunglow streams upon it: sometimes it is vague and far as the fall of snow upon the woodlands when there is no wind, as the whisper of the last breath of air swooning upon the pastures, as the faint falling music of the wild hyacinths and lilies of the valley in

the hollow beyond the blown spray of the waterfall.]

And passing down a narrow street, the Lute-player comes upon a man going cautiously in the shadow: who, fearful of following steps, turns, muttering hoarsely:

"Who art thou?"

But hearing from the Lute-player that he is only a wandering musician faring waywardly through the city, the man cries blithely: —

"What do you sing? For I know where a good song will be welcome!"

Whereupon the Lute-player answers simply:

"I sing of Life . . . and Death."

With a challenging voice the man says: —

"Come, a song for a song!"

And he begins a carol of life and the many joys thereof, and mocking at death: —

O Day come unto me,
Fair and so sweet!
Crown'd shalt thou be,
And with wing'd feet,
Escape the invading sea,
Whose bitter line
Follows o'er fleet.
What joy thou would'st is thine:
Life is divine,
O Fair and Sweet!

Death is a paltry thought:
A little troublous thing —
An insect's sting!
Beautiful Day, oh, heed it not!
Death is a vain, a —

But he ceases abruptly as the Lute-player suddenly touches his lute: and so passing rare is the music that the man stands entranced. Nor does he speak any word or make any gesture, as he hears it lessening and vanishing.

[In the deep shadow of the street the Lute-player is seen no more, and the thrilling, evanishing strain passes away at last, sweet as faint inland echoes heard longingly through the dusk at sea.]

With a low sigh the man turns, but suddenly reels with horror to see that he is in a city of flame, and that the street before him is a broad and fathomless river of blood. As, with a terrible cry, he falls therein, he does not see the figure of his enemy behind him, nor feel the long knife of the assassin that transfixes his heart.

[And the Lute-player, traversing the city, crosses one of the bridges that span the immemorial river whereon it is set. Halting midway, he looks broodingly upon the slow-moving flood whose gurgling current washes the piers beneath him. Once, smiling darkly, he raises his hand, about to play a music so wild and strange that the whole city should hearken: but, with a sigh, he forbears. As he moves, he descries in the opposite embrasure a woman, young and fair but for the haggard weariness of her face, stooping, and staring steadily at the water in its dull, monotonous flow. Softly he touches his lute to a delicate, distant melody: exquisite vibrations as though of long forgotten strains, of loved sounds and voices.]

Once, with a strange, reluctant fear, the girl turns; but seeing him not in the shadow, and thinking herself alone with the murmuring water, looks no more. So subtly soft and sweet is the music stealing upon her ears, that it is as though it came from afar. Hearing it, she smells again the wild roses and the honeysuckle in the hedges; listens to the bees lazily fumbling among the red and white clover in the hot pastures, to the faint wind astir among the flowering beans, to the lowing of distant cows, to the haunting call of the cuckoo above the woodlands where a sleepy murmur comes from the cushats' nests. But, listening entranced, the haunting strains come to her at last not from afar, but from below, deep from the heart of the flood flowing onward for ever and ever. Suddenly a great trembling comes upon her: and in a low voice she cries: —

"Who is there?"

As from among the grasses she hears the sound of small feet running, and of a soft, low laughter. Springing downward with a cry, she hearkens the strange music, ringing in her ears wildly sweet: but as the dark waters overwhelm her, she knows nought save a horrible choking as of a suffocating child, the fierce execrations and blows of a man, and a fearful, fathomless gulf into which she is sinking as a stone into the abyss.

[For long, and as though wearily, the Lute-player leans upon the bridge. The wash of the water and the sough of the night-

wind alone break the stillness; yet it is to him as though with their undertone are wrought remoter harmonies of earth and sky, wherein also the moonlight and the far icy stars and the wandering clouds have utterance.

When, at the last, veiled in shadow, he passes on, the dawn breaks. Erelong the opal of the east is haloed by great fan-like streamers of gold and crimson: and those looking upon the morning star see beneath it the unfolding of the splendor of the Flower of Day. The boatmen on the long barges and moored sloops upon the river hear for a moment the echo of a sweet, a blithe sweet song: and the peasants trooping through the fields listen intently to catch again the happy lilt of delicate strains heard afar: and upon the hills the shepherds look upward, with hands shading their eyes, half startled by faint vanishing cadences of joyous music.

The birds sing, and the flowers bloom, and the winds unfold their wings and fare forth in the sunshine. Everywhere, everywhere, the joy and glory of life. And the Lute-player, clothed with a radiance of sunlight and with eyes of morning, moves onward through the glad noon, playing ever his wild, sweet song: for unto him is no night and no day, and unto him no morrow comes for whom all morrows are but strains remembered from an antique song.]

The Whisperer.

The Whisperer.

I.

[A summer noon, in a crowded thoroughfare of London. The sunlight slants through a thin veil of blue, and becomes a pale gold on the street, where the endless surge of the traffic is as the waters of the sea caught in a narrow strait. Among the hundreds who hurry this way and that goes a man who looks beyond him as though he descried somewhat afar off for which he yearned. Sometimes he stops abruptly, and with startled eyes stares at the man or woman at that moment by his side: sometimes he speaks, though none answers him.]

THE MAN.

[Stopping abruptly, in his rapid walk eastward, while the light wanes from his eyes.]

Who spoke?

THE WHISPERER.

It is I.

THE MAN.

Who art thou?

[Silence.]

THE MAN.

[*Turning first to one person moving past him, then to another.*] What is it?

[Each stares for a moment, but none answers. All whom he addresses hurry on without regarding him: a few glance at him and mutter irritably or scornfully. Slowly he resumes his way. Again the voice is in his ear.]

THE MAN.

Who spoke?

THE WHISPERER.

It is I.

THE MAN.

Who art thou?

THE WHISPERER.

I am of Those who watch.

THE MAN.

For whom?

[Silence.]

THE MAN.

For what?

[Silence.]

THE MAN.

Art thou here?

THE WHISPERER.

I am here.

THE MAN.

I see thee not: where art thou?

THE WHISPERER.

I am in the rhythm of the whirling wheels and the falling hoofs, in the noise of innumerous feet, and the murmur of myriad breaths. The sparrows flicker in the light of my footfall, and the high sunlight is in my eyes.

THE MAN.

What would'st thou?

THE WHISPERER.

I have no will, O falling wave. It is I who say: what would'st thou?

THE MAN.

Where am I?

THE WHISPERER.

In a vast maëlstrom in a vaster sea.

THE MAN.

Am I then a lost wave?

THE WHISPERER.

A rising and a falling wave.

THE MAN.

[*Reiterating below his breath.*] A rising and a falling wave!

THE WHISPERER.

A falling and a rising wave.

THE MAN.

Art thou a spirit?

[Silence.]

THE MAN.

What art thou?

[Silence.]

THE MAN.

[*Turning desperately to an old man at his side.*] It is thou! Speak, speak!

[The old man looks at him fearfully, shakes off his grasp, and hurries onward.]

THE WHISPERER.

I am here.

THE MAN.

If I am of those for whom you watch tell me to what end?

THE WHISPERER.

That, if thou wilt, when thou art ready, thou may'st hear and see.

THE MAN.

Thus be it. I would hear, and see.

[Even as he speaks, the Man sees the crowd in the street become trebled: and in his ears is a noise of crying and lamentation, with vague remote shouts of victory and

defiance. Like unto the innumerable falling of the waves upon the sea is the dim, confused rumor of the strife of human passions, embodied in shadowy shapes, with wild eyes of hope, dread, wrath, horror, and dismay. Beside each man or woman moves two others, the phantom of the soul and the phantom of the body. And ever the phantom of the soul, with its eyes of morning glory, looks through the veil of flesh into its fellow, now dulled or sleeping, now weary or heedless, now listening intently, now alive and eager. And ever the phantom of the body moves a little in advance of its fellow, and weaves a glamour before the eyes, and sings a wildering song into the ears, and laughs low because the flames of fire that are its feet seem like roses, and the dust and ashes upon its head are as fragrant lilies, and the dropping decays wherewith it is clad wave like green branches that lure to the woodland.]

THE MAN.

[*Shuddering.*] Everywhere the Evil One has his triumph.

THE WHISPERER.

There is no Evil One.

THE MAN.

But he — the phantom of the body, who weaves his charm of the grave and his rune of corruption —

THE WHISPERER.

Look!

[And the Man, looking, sees only one figure moving beside each human being of all the hurrying myriad.]

THE MAN.

Who — who is it?

THE WHISPERER.

It is the phantom of the man or of the woman.

THE MAN.

Are they, then, one: the phantom of the soul and the phantom of the body?

THE WHISPERER.

They are one.

THE MAN.

[*Terrified.*] And thou?

[Silence.]

II.

[Under a chestnut tree, on a grassy place, near a cottage, in the remote country. There is no moon, but its radiance comes diffused through soft, filmy clouds. In the darkness, the Man stands, listening intently.]

THE MAN.

I am not alone?

[Silence.]

THE MAN.

I know thou art nigh. It is on the wind, on the leaves, in the grass.

THE WHISPERER.

I am here.

THE MAN.

The time is come. Tell me that which thou art — show me that which thou art.

THE WHISPERER.

Look!

[And the Man, looking, beholds for the first time the flowing of the wind. As he looks, the heavens open, and the flowing of the wind is from the starry depths, and is filled with a myriad myriad aerial beings, — souls coming and going, fair spirits, shadows and shapes innumerable, strange and sometimes terrible.]

THE MAN.

[*Awestruck.*] What art thou?

THE WHISPERER.

I am the rhythm of the sap in the grass and the trees, of the blood in all living things, of the running of waters, of the falling of dews and rains, of the equipoise of oceans, of the four winds of the world, of the vast swing of the Earth.

THE MAN.

Thou art the God of this world! Thou art God! Lo, I worship thee!

THE WHISPERER.

Behold!

[And the Man, looking, beholds through the mist of stars a whirling grain of sand, falling forever through the waste eternity of Oblivion.]

THE WHISPERER.

That whirling grain of dust is the World of which thou hast spoken.

THE MAN.

Thou art no other than God, the God whom all races have worshipped since Time was!

THE WHISPERER.

Behold!

[And the Man, looking, beholds amid the depths of the stars a vast Shape, seated on a golden sun among the Pleiades, who swings forever, as a lamp of incense, the Seven Stars, and with them all the stars and planets and suns and moons of the universe: and as he swings this Lamp of Incense, he sings a song of praise and worship to the Most High.]

THE WHISPERER.

Behold, thou hast seen thy God, and the God whom all the races of the world have worshipped since time was. And now, turn thine eyes upon the glory of Him yet again.

[And the Man, looking, beholds another grain of sand whirling forever through the waste infinities of Oblivion.]

THE WHISPERER.

That whirling grain of sand is the vast universe of the sun and moon and stars that thou knowest, and all the suns and planets and stars eye hath seen or the brain conceived.

THE MAN.

[*Scarce whispering.*] And God?

THE WHISPERER.

Thou canst not see the invisible speck that was His throne. Behold the grain of sand that was His universe.

THE MAN.

Who art thou?

[Silence.]

THE MAN.

[*In his soul.*] Is there nought beyond?

THE WHISPERER.

Verily: the nearer foam of the Sea of Life.

THE MAN.

Doth God live?

THE WHISPERER.

Beyond the extreme horizon of the Sea of Life, Gods and Powers and Dominions bow down before the Most High.

THE MAN.

And then?

THE WHISPERER.

The Sea of Life begins.

THE MAN.

[*Despairingly.*] Beyond all thoughts to find Him — all prayer to reach Him!

THE WHISPERER.

Nay, He is here.

[The Man, bewildered, stares around him as the moon sails from out the last films of mist. In his hand is a blade of grass, that he had not plucked.]

THE MAN.

[Vaguely repeating.] *Nay, He is here!*

THE WHISPERER.

I am thine to serve, O spirit that dieth not.

THE MAN.

Who art thou?

[Silence.]

And I remain thus, dreaming, listening to that interminable dialogue between the heart that desires and the reason that reprehends, going from hypothesis to hypothesis, like a blind bird casting itself incessantly against the four walls of its cage.

L'IRRÉMÉDIABLE.

THE END.